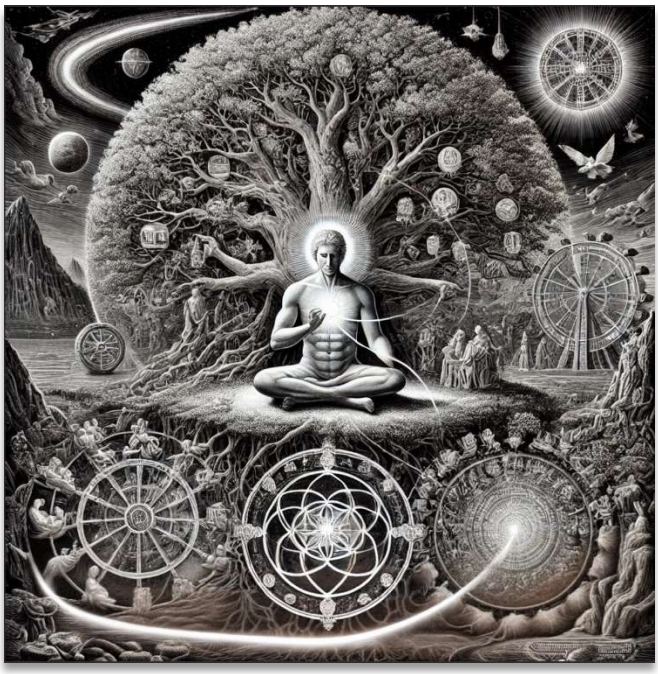
Kamma: The Weavers Thread



Beneath the Bodhi tree, the Buddha shared,
A truth profound, with wisdom declared:
Not stars, nor chance, nor unseen will,
But actions crafted through thought and skill.

"Kamma," he said, "is intention's stream,
The force behind life's shifting dream.
Through body, speech, and mind, we weave,
The tapestry of what we conceive."

Why do some live with joy and grace,
While others toil in a troubled place?
Why is one born to health and peace,
While another's trials seem never to cease?

Acts of kindness, generosity, and care,
Shape a world of joy, serene and fair.

Harmful deeds, by anger inflamed,
Bring forth suffering, sorrow unnamed.
Yet kamma flows, not fixed or bound,
Its course is shaped by what's around.
Through mindful steps, with wisdom's art,
We transform the seeds within the heart.

"Intention is the source," the Buddha taught,
The origin from which all actions are wrought.
Not deed alone, but the mind's refrain,
Determines the harvest of pleasure or pain.

The Sutta[ii] does make clear,
The ties between joy and life's veneer.
Why some may prosper, while others strive,
The law of kamma keeps it alive.

Do good, and goodness will arise,
A life of ease, with open skies.
Harm sown deep by careless hand,
Will sprout in sorrow, like arid land.

Yet freedom lies within our grasp,
To shape the future, unbind the clasp.
Through heedful thought and present care,
We cleanse our kamma and lay life bare.

No being erases what we have done,
Yet wisdom redeems the misguided one.
For here and now, the choice is ours,
To act with clarity, reclaim our powers.

Awake to kamma, its truth profound,
See how it shapes the world around.
Yet through this law, a path does shine,
To end all craving, the aim refined.

So let us act with a mindful heart,
Choosing wisely the life we start.
Each thought, each word, each deed we do,
Shapes not just the world, but the self anew.

"Cetanā[iii]," the Buddha said, clear and wise,
"Is kamma, the thread where intention lies.
Through willful thought, by word and deed,
The seeds of life are sown and freed."

Not by chance, nor unseen hand,
But by choices made, we shape our land.
Kamma flows where volition leads,
A field of actions sprouting deeds.

With body, speech, and mind combined,
The heart's intent leaves trails behind.
Wholesome acts, like sunlight bright,
Dispel the darkness, invite the light.

Yet acts of harm, from anger sprung,
Lay paths of sorrow yet unsung.
For kamma, though unseen, is real,
Its fruits the heart must one day feel.

No fate decrees, no force compels,
But volition's tide forever swells.
Through heedful care, the course can bend,
Toward peace, where suffering ends.

The Buddha's words in wisdom shine:
"Kamma is will, the heart's design.
Having willed, one acts with care,
In body, speech, and mind laid bare."

So, what we choose in each small thought,
Creates the world we've always sought.
A mindful heart, a steadfast way,
Transforms the night into the day.

Thus, kamma's truth, a mirror clear,
Reflects the seeds we plant right here.
Through wholesome deeds, the path unfolds,
A life of peace, the treasure untold.

But deeper still, the truth does sing:
Freedom lies in understanding.
When craving fades and wisdom grows,
The wheel of rebirth gently slows.

Awake to volition, this subtle thread,
The fabric of life by which we're led.
Yet through this thread, a truth profound:
By letting go, true freedoms found.
Each thought, each act, a choice anew,
A path to walk, a self to renew.

With kamma's reins held in our hand,
We shape the life in which we stand.

So, tread with care, the Buddha said,
For kamma's fruits are widely spread.
And in this truth, the way appears:
A path beyond all worldly fears. [iv]

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Kamma: The Weaver's Thread"

Dīpabhasadhamma's image serves as a compelling visual representation of the poem ***"Kamma: The Weaver's Thread,"*** which intricately explores the Buddha's teachings on kamma (karma). The layered symbolism in the image reflects the poem's verses, weaving together the concepts of intention, action, and their consequences into a unified artistic vision.

At the center of the image sits a serene figure, exuding composure and focus. The figure's hand is positioned as if guiding or holding an ethereal thread, a direct reflection of the verse: *"Cetanā, the Buddha said, clear and wise, / 'Is kamma, the thread where intention lies.'"* This highlights the central teaching that intention is the source of all actions and their outcomes. The serene expression of the central figure suggests mindfulness and mastery over one's volition, symbolizing the control we have over the shaping of our lives through intention and action.

The majestic tree behind the figure is a profound symbol of the interconnectedness and continuity of kamma. Its roots dig deep into the earth, representing the Foundations of past actions, while its expansive branches reach toward the sky, symbolizing the far-reaching consequences of these actions. This aligns with the verse: *"Kamma flows where volition leads, / A field of actions sprouting deeds."* The tree's intertwining branches, laden with cosmic and worldly symbols, reflect the complex web of causes and effects described in the poem.

At the base of the tree, intricate wheels, reminiscent of the Wheel of Samsara, symbolize the cycles of birth, death, and rebirth shaped by kamma. These wheels visually echo the lines: *"No fate decrees, no force compels, / But volition's tide forever swells."* The contrast between the glowing central wheel and the darker, more chaotic elements surrounding it illustrates the potential to transcend suffering through mindful and wholesome actions, as expressed in the poem's plea: *"Yet freedom lies within our grasp, / To shape the future, unbind the clasp."*

The radiating threads emerging from the figure and connecting to the environment reinforce the idea that every action, thought, and word creates ripples in the fabric of existence. This dynamic interplay reflects the verse: *"Each thought, each word, each deed we do, / Shapes not just the world, but the self anew."* The interconnected pathways highlight the dual potential of kamma—either to bind us to suffering or to guide us toward liberation.

The various human figures depicted around the tree symbolize the diversity of experiences shaped by kamma, from joy to sorrow. These figures resonate with the verse: *"Acts of kindness, generosity, and care, / Shape a world of joy, serene and fair. / Harmful deeds, by anger inflamed, / Bring forth suffering, sorrow unnamed."* Their placement emphasizes the agency of individuals in determining their paths through wholesome or harmful actions.

The celestial elements above the tree—planets, stars, and radiant orbs—convey the universal and timeless scope of kamma's influence. This highlights the poem's reflection on the enduring nature of volition and action, as seen in the lines: *"Through willful thought, by word and deed, / The seeds of life are sown and freed."*

Finally, the image's interplay of light and shadow mirrors the duality of kamma as both a source of suffering and a tool for liberation. The brighter areas surrounding the central figure reflect the verse: *"Through heedful care, the course can bend, / Toward peace, where suffering ends."* The darker, more chaotic areas symbolize the unwholesome actions born of anger and ignorance, as described in the poem: *"Yet acts of harm, from anger sprung, / Lay paths of sorrow yet unsung."*

This image beautifully encapsulates the teachings of the poem, drawing on its key verses to visually articulate the Buddha's profound insights into kamma. It invites the viewer to reflect on the choices they make and their far-reaching consequences, reinforcing the poem's ultimate message: *"With kamma's reins held in our hand, / We shape the life in which we stand."* Dīpabhasadhamma's artwork stands as a testament to the transformative power of mindfulness and intentional action, echoing the Buddha's timeless wisdom.

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Letting Go of the Raft

Upon the bank, the river flows,
A path unmarked where no one knows.
Its currents strong, its waters wide,
A restless course, no place to bide.

A traveler stands, the way unclear,
The other shore both far and near.
No bridge to span, no ford to find,
Yet onward calls the quiet mind.

From gathered reeds, a raft is made,
A vessel born of hand and blade.
It floats upon the shifting tide,
A fragile hope, the stream to ride.

With trembling hands, the traveler rows,
Through swirling depths, where water grows.
The rocks resist, the rapids roar,
Yet steady hands steer evermore.

At last, the shore is reached, serene,
A place of calm, a space unseen.
The raft, once cherished, now let go,
Its purpose served, its work to show.

For tools are means, not ends to hold,
Their worth is found in use, not gold.
Once carried through the river's strife,
The raft is left, for it is life.

And so, the lesson flows as clear,
Let go the clinging, end the fear.
The tools we build, the paths we take,
Are not the truths but forms we make.

The raft, the river, the distant shore,
All teach of less, of needing no more.
To cross, to flow, to find release,
Is to embrace the way of peace. ☸

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Let Go of the Raft"

The artwork of this image beautifully encapsulates the essence of the poem ***"Let Go of the Raft"*** by Dīpabhasadhamma. The visual and literary elements are deeply intertwined, presenting a symbolic journey of understanding, liberation, and the transience of tools in achieving enlightenment.

In the image, the traveler kneels by the bank of a wide, tumultuous river, crafting a simple but sturdy raft. This scene corresponds directly to the poem's opening lines, *"From gathered reeds, a raft is made, / A vessel born of hand and blade."* The act of building the raft represents human ingenuity and the effort needed to navigate the challenges of life. It also symbolizes the Buddha's teachings as practical tools to traverse the turbulence of existence.

The river dominates the image, its swirling waters reflecting the verse, *"Its currents strong, its waters wide, / A restless course, no place to bide."* The dangerous rapids and chaotic flow symbolize the challenges, suffering, and unpredictability of samsara, the cycle of existence. The river's vastness also mirrors the seemingly insurmountable nature of life's struggles, which the traveler must cross to reach the serene shore of liberation.

In the background, the far shore is depicted as calm and lush, a haven of peace and clarity. This corresponds to the poem's lines, *"At last, the shore is reached, serene, / A place of calm, a space unseen."* The distant shore symbolizes the goal of mental awakening, a state free from clinging and suffering. Its tranquil depiction reinforces the idea of release and serenity achieved through the teachings of the Buddha.

The traveler's focused expression and the careful construction of the raft resonate with the poem's message of mindfulness and intentionality, *"With trembling hands, the traveler rows, / Through swirling depths, where water grows."* The image conveys the idea that the journey requires effort, courage, and the proper use of tools, much like the Buddha's teachings are to be skillfully applied.

Crucially, the poem emphasizes the impermanence and instrumental nature of the raft: *"The raft, once cherished, now let go, / Its purpose served, its work to show."* The image captures this concept through the simplicity of the raft itself. It is neither ornate nor permanent, reflecting the idea that tools, including the Buddha's teachings, are means to an end, not ends in themselves.

The natural elements surrounding the traveler—trees, rocks, and flowing water—add a grounding, earthy quality to the image, reminding viewers of the interconnectedness of nature and life's impermanence. This ties into the poem's conclusion, *"The tools we build, the paths we take, / Are not the truths but forms we make."* The traveler's journey across the river is not about attachment to the raft but about understanding its temporary role in achieving liberation.

In essence, the image vividly illustrates the core message of the poem: the importance of using the tools of wisdom, mindfulness, and effort to navigate life's challenges while remembering to release them once their purpose is fulfilled. The act of "letting go" becomes not an end of the journey but the beginning of true peace, aligning perfectly with the teachings of the Buddha and the heart of Dīpabhasadhamma's verse.

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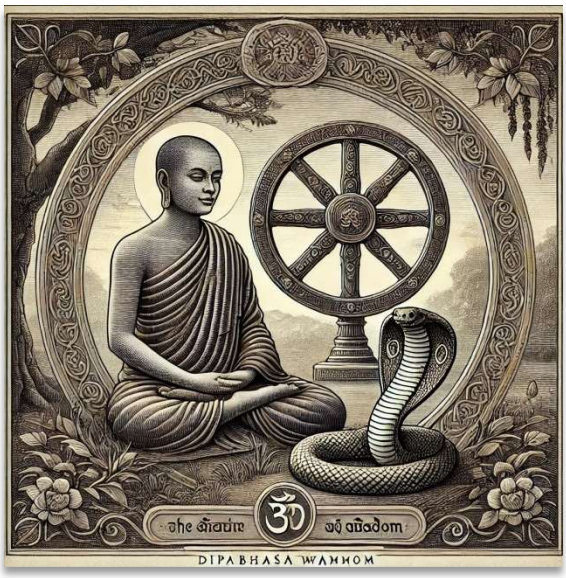
The Nature of Wisdom



Beneath the shade where rivers lie,
A serpent rests with watchful eye.
Its coil is still, its breath is calm,
Its silence bears a potent balm.

Yet, grasp it wrong, with careless hand,
The bite will burn, the wound will stand.
For wisdom's form, though gentle-seeming,
Will punish those who come unmeaning.

The Buddha's words, like snakes, are pure,
A quiet strength, a guide, a cure.
Not bound by dogma, cage, or creed,
But tools to serve each seeker's need.

Each lesson waits, both sharp and wise,
For hands that meet it, measured eyes.
The truths are clear, but only seen
By those whose minds are calm, serene.

Mistreated, though, their use turns sour,
A poison spreads, the heart will cower.
For teachings held to feed the self,
Are venom placed on wisdom's shelf.

"Grasp well," he said, "and know its nature,
A guide, not king, nor holy stature.
A tool to wield, a flame to light,
Not chains to bind or walls of might."

The snake lies still, its task is clear,
To help, not harm, to calm, not fear.
But misuse leads to venom's spread,
A mind ensnared, by suffering fed.

Reflect, dear seeker, on your hold,
What truths you grasp, what lies you've told.
For wisdom bends to skillful hand,
A path revealed, a life unplanned.

Deep in the grove, where silence reigns,
A serpent waits, its coil remains.
It does not hiss, it does not strike,
But holds its truth for those who seek alike.

Its body gleams, a silent guide,
A tempered force, with nothing to hide.
Yet to the hands of haste or greed,
Its wisdom bends, its power recedes.

The Buddha's words, like this coiled art,
Are tools to heal, to touch the heart.
But if they rest on lips alone,
Their power fades, their truth unknown.

For wisdom lives not in the mind,
If practice trails too far behind.
The map is not the road you tread,
The meal is not the words you've read.

"Grasp well," he said, "but with intent,
Not for show, or pride's ascent.
The teachings serve the heart in motion,
Not still, unmoved, like stagnant oceans."

The snake, once poised to teach and guide,
Becomes inert when rules preside.
When words are hoarded, truth grows cold,
A lifeless serpent, wisdom sold.

To know is not enough to grow,
To walk the path is what bestows
The gift of freedom, clear and bright,
To see beyond the dark to light.

So, heed this truth, both sharp and plain,
Without the act, the words are vain.
The serpent's coil is not a prize,
But a chance to open seeking eyes.

Reflect, dear one, on what you hold,
The path is walked, not bought or sold.
For wisdom waits in steps, not schemes,
A journey lived, not dreamed in dreams. [vi]

Image Symbolism of the Poem "The Nature of Wisdom

This image masterfully brings to life the themes of the poem "The Nature of Wisdom" by visualizing its central metaphors and teachings. At the heart of the composition is the Buddha. Nearby is the symbol of the eight-spoke wheel of the Eightfold Path. This wheel, symbolizing the Buddha's teaching and guidance, embodies the stanza: "*The Buddha's words, like this coiled art, / Are tools to heal, to touch the heart.*" It reinforces the idea that the teachings are not rigid commands but practical tools for liberation when wielded with mindfulness and intent.

The presence of the snake, calm and coiled nearby, serves as a striking visual representation of wisdom itself, echoing the verses: "*Yet, grasp it wrong, with careless hand, / The bite will burn, the wound will stand.*" This imagery draws attention to the delicate balance needed to approach the Buddha's teachings. Like the snake, wisdom can heal or harm depending on how it is engaged. Its poised stillness mirrors the warning in the poem about how misuse of wisdom—through haste, greed, or ego—can transform its transformative potential into something destructive.

The Buddha's posture, calm and contemplative, reflects the stanza: "*Each lesson waits, both sharp and wise, / For hands that meet it, measured eyes.*" This reinforces the importance of a steady mind and clear intention when engaging with wisdom. His deliberate grasp of the Eightfold Path emphasizes the message to "grasp well" and to avoid treating the teachings as objects of dogma or pride, as articulated in the lines: "*Grasp well," he said, "and know its nature, / A guide, not king, nor holy stature.*"

The tranquil background, with its harmonious tones, captures the ideal mental state described in the poem: "*The truths are clear, but only seen / By those whose minds are calm, serene.*" The serene environment further suggests the stillness and mindfulness needed to unlock the deeper truths of the teachings, as described throughout the poem.

Overall, this image emphasizes key stanzas that highlight the dual nature of wisdom, the care required to wield it skillfully, and the transformative potential of the Buddha's teachings when approached with intent and mindfulness. It invites the viewer to meditate on the delicate interplay between understanding and practice.

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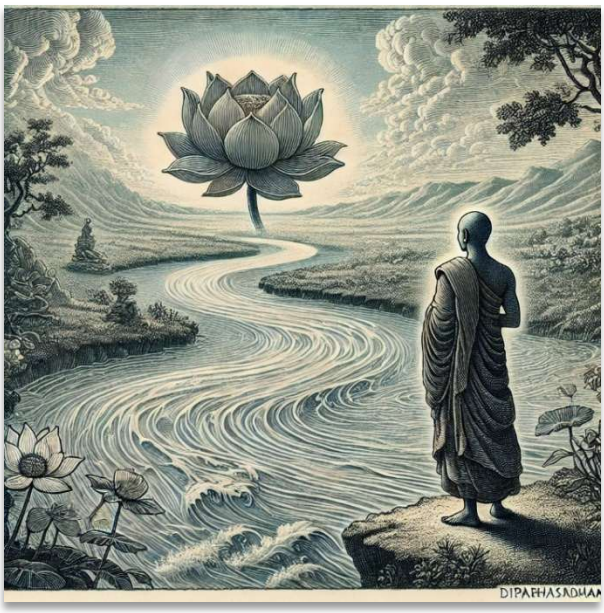
The River and the Lotus



From quiet heights, the stream unfolds,
Gentle threads through open molds.
Moving with ease, untouched, aware,
Each moment held, beyond compare.

Life reveals its ceaseless way,
Where stones arise and waters stray.
Each bend a challenge, each turn unknown,
River shifts, path its own.

Through swirling depths, it twists and bends,
Seeking balance that never ends.
Surface churns, its course unsure,
Yet still it flows, quiet and pure.

Delta spreads, an open field,
Where waters soften, tensions yield.
Where currents pause, their striving done,
A restless journey to stillness run.

Amidst stillness, a seed takes root,
In silt-rich soil, where waters dilute.
A tender stem, a fragile bloom,
A lotus rises from the gloom.

Unstained by mud, its petals unfold,
A radiant gift in colors bold.
Yet even beauty, in time, will wane,
Its petals fall, its form remains.

For all that flows will one day fade,
Its form dispersed, its shape unmade.
Yet in the lotus, a truth takes hold,
A cycle of life, profound and bold.

It blooms, it fades, and so renews,
A flow of all that life imbues.
A mirrored dance of stream and flower,
A fleeting form in every hour.

A river shows, for those who see,
A quiet law: impermanency.
Release, allow the stream, let go,
To move unbound by thought or dream.
A lotus lives where waters rest,
A symbol soft of life's own quest.
Teaching not to grasp or claim,
For what we are returns the same.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "The River and the Lotus"

Dīpabhasadhamma puts much thought and introspection into the images he creates. This particular image beautifully reflects the intricate and contemplative themes of the poem, *"The River and the Lotus,"* also by Dīpabhasadhamma, capturing the essence of impermanence and renewal inherent in the Buddha's teachings. The visual composition and its symbolic elements are deeply aligned with the poem's verses, presenting a harmonious blend of nature's flow and human introspection.

At the center of the image, a serene figure stands on a rocky bank, gazing across a river that winds through the landscape. This figure represents the observer—the seeker—contemplating the nature of existence, as mirrored in the poem's opening lines: *"From quiet heights, the stream unfolds, / Gentle threads through open molds."* The vantage point of the figure suggests a moment of reflection, observing the river's ceaseless motion as a metaphor for life's ever-changing course.

The river dominates the scene, its swirling waters flowing with both turbulence and grace, embodying the poem's depiction of life's challenges and unpredictability: *"Life reveals its ceaseless way, / Where stones arise and waters stray."* The winding path of the river symbolizes the journey of life, with its twists and turns representing the uncertainties and obstacles encountered along the way. The interplay of light and shadow on the water surface reflects the duality of life—peace and struggle, clarity and confusion—captured in the verse: *"Surface churns, its course unsure, / Yet still it flows, quiet and pure."*

The lotus, rising majestically from the river's center, serves as the focal point of the image and the poem's central metaphor. Its vibrant bloom and untainted petals symbolize purity and enlightenment amidst the murky waters of samsara. This visual aligns seamlessly with the poem's lines: *"Unstained by mud, its petals unfold, / A radiant gift in colors bold."* The lotus's presence in the middle of the river underscores the possibility of beauty and wisdom emerging even in the midst of life's challenges.

The river's delta, visible in the distance, suggests the culmination of the river's journey, where its restless energy dissipates into stillness, echoing the stanza: *"Delta spreads, an open field, / Where waters soften, tensions yield."* The delta serves as a symbol of release and surrender, inviting the viewer to reflect on the transient nature of life and the peace that arises from letting go.

Surrounding the river and the lotus are lush trees and open skies, which frame the scene with a sense of expansiveness and connection to the greater whole. This natural setting mirrors the poem's acknowledgment of the cyclical nature of existence: *"It blooms, it fades, and so renews, / A flow of all that life imbues."* The lotus, as a symbol of impermanence and renewal, invites the observer to embrace the ebb and flow of life without attachment.

Finally, the figure's contemplative stance and the tranquil yet dynamic environment around them embody the poem's closing message: *"A lotus lives where waters rest, / A symbol soft of life's own quest. / Teaching not to grasp or claim, / For what we are returns the same."* The image invites the viewer to step into the role of the seeker, engaging

with the river and the lotus as metaphors for life's impermanence and the wisdom found in acceptance and release.

This image beautifully reflects a visual meditation on the themes Dīpabhasadhamma paints in the poem, drawing the viewer into a deeper understanding of the transient, interconnected nature of existence. It captures the profound beauty of letting go and finding peace in the impermanence that defines all things, resonating powerfully with the timeless teachings of the Buddha.

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The Snare of Craving

Craving calls, a ceaseless tide,
It whispers soft, it swells with pride.
The heart leaps forth, the mind takes aim,
But each new grasp fans the flame.

"Desire grows, like a creeping vine,"
The Buddha spoke, "it wraps, entwines.
For those who yield, it weaves its snare,
And binds them fast to sorrow's lair."

It leaps from thought to fleeting thought,
An endless hunger, always sought.
"Like a monkey roaming tree to tree,
Craving blinds what could be free."

Each fruit we taste, each fleeting prize,
Leaves longing deep, the fire to rise.
"But he who tears the roots apart,
Who knows the truth within his heart,

Is free, like drops from lotus leaf,
Untouched by sorrow, pain, or grief."

The creeper's root lies hidden deep,
Its tendrils twist where shadows creep.
"To cut it clean, dig with care,
Pull up its root, leave nothing there.

For if it grows, it will ensnare,
Like grass that spreads in summer air.
Dig deep, as one who seeks the balm,
And find the peace of perfect calm."

The Buddha showed the path so clear,
"To walk this way, have no fear.
Craving is the fire that burns,
Extinguished, life itself returns."

Oh seeker, pause, reflect, and see,
The path that leads to being free.
Craving, the vine, can never bind,
When wisdom blooms within the mind.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "The Snare of Craving"

Dīpabhasadhamma's insight and understanding of the teachings of the Buddha are not only revealed in the words of his poems, but also in the composition of his artwork. His image beautifully encapsulates the themes and teachings presented in the poem *"The Snare of Craving*." The intricate symbolism within the artwork vividly illustrates the Buddha's allegorical teaching on the entangling and destructive nature of craving.

At the center of the image, we see a figure ensnared by thick, creeping vines. These vines represent the insidious and relentless grip of craving as described in the poem: *"Desire grows, like a creeping vine, / The Buddha spoke, 'it wraps, entwines.'"* The figure's posture, twisted and constrained, conveys the suffering caused by unchecked desire and attachment, echoing the lines, *"For those who yield, it weaves its snare, / And binds them fast to sorrow's lair."* The physical binding depicted in the image is a visual metaphor for the spiritual and mental entrapment caused by craving.

The tendrils of the vine wind themselves intricately around the figure, rooting deeply into the ground, symbolizing how craving takes hold at a foundational level of the mind and heart: *"The creeper's root lies hidden deep, / Its tendrils twist where shadows creep."* The gnarled and chaotic nature of the vines suggests the complexity and persistence of desire, emphasizing that escaping its hold requires more than superficial effort.

To the right of the image, the lotus blossom stands in stark contrast to the tangled vines. The lotus, a classic symbol of purity and enlightenment, represents liberation and peace, as highlighted in the lines: *"But he who tears the roots apart, / Who knows the truth within his heart, / Is free, like drops from lotus leaf, / Untouched by sorrow, pain, or grief."* The lotus blooms untouched by the mud, symbolizing the possibility of rising above the defilements of craving and attachment. Its pristine form serves as a visual reminder of the ultimate goal of Dhamma practice: freedom from suffering.

The background depicts a tranquil landscape of rivers and open skies, symbolizing the calm and clarity that come from cutting the roots of craving. This aligns with the poem's closing verses: *"Craving, the vine, can never bind, / When wisdom blooms within the mind."* The serene horizon contrasts with the chaos of the vines, suggesting that liberation is attainable for those who follow the Buddha's guidance.

The lone figure's expression and posture convey struggle but also determination, embodying the seeker who must face the challenge of rooting out craving. The surrounding elements—shadows cast by the vines, the expansive landscape, and the radiant lotus—create a narrative of entanglement and potential freedom, visually reinforcing the Buddha's teaching: *"To cut it clean, dig with care, / Pull up its root, leave nothing there."*

Dīpabhasadhamma's image powerfully symbolizes the themes of the poem, presenting the viewer with a stark contrast between entrapment and freedom from suffering. The creeping vines and the radiant lotus together highlight the struggle against craving and the transformative power of wisdom and mindfulness. The visual narrative, like the poem, serves as a call to action for seekers to reflect, dig deep, and free themselves from the binding snare of desire.

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The Wisdom of Release

An arrow flies, unseen, unheard,
Its path as silent as a word
Unspoken, yet it strikes so deep,
Awakening pain from restless sleep.

We grasp the shaft with trembling hand,
And curse the skies, the earth, the sand.
"Why me?" we cry, and writhe in pain,
The wound grows sharper for our disdain.

But pain, like arrows, cannot last,
Unless we bind it to the past.
The sting, though fierce, will fade away,
If we release its hold today.

Yet here we stand, with hearts impaled,
Our suffering, a ship unsailed.
We twist the arrow, seeking why,
But every turn brings a deeper sigh.

The Buddha speaks of letting go,
To cease the questions we cannot know.
"The first wound hurts," the Teacher said,
"But the second is the one we've fed."

For anguish lives where we ignite
The flames of anger, fear, and fight.
But peace is found when we disarm
The mind's reflex to sound alarm.

The arrow strikes, yet we endure,
By turning inward, finding cure.
Not in the why, nor in the blame,
But in the stillness, free from shame.

So, leave the arrow where it fell,
Its path has more than pain to tell.
Through mindful breath, the heart can heal,
And show us truths no wound can steal.

An arrow flies, unseen, unbidden,
Its poison buried, yet not hidden.
We clutch the wound, and time suspends,
A thousand questions our mind defends.

"Who sent it here? From where, and why?
What wood was carved? How sharp? How high?"
We linger long on the how and who,
Ignoring what the moment asks us to do.

The wound persists, the pain takes hold,
Its poison spreads, its touch turns cold.
Yet still, we ask, and rage, and fret,
While life's brief spark begins to set.

Buddha speaks, his voice like balm,
"Why waste your breath on questions drawn?
The arrow's truth is not in its lore,
But in the act of healing more."

Remove the shaft, let wisdom rise,
Release the need for countless whys.
For knowing all does not delay,
The certainty of life's decay.

Instead, attend the wound with care,
Find solace in the present air.
Let go the clinging, cease the fight,
And turn your gaze toward what is right.

The poisoned arrow is not the end,
But the means through which we can transcend.
To see beyond, to heal, to grow,
Is all that truly matters to know.

About the Poem "The Wisdom of Release"

Life is full of arrows, isn't it? They come unbidden, out of nowhere, striking us in ways we often feel unprepared for. These arrows may appear as sudden loss, a harsh word, a betrayal, or even the deep pangs of existential uncertainty. When struck, our natural inclination is to ask questions: *Why did this happen? Who or what is responsible? What could I have done to prevent it?* But if we pause and truly examine, we might notice that these questions, though understandable, don't heal the wound. Instead, they often deepen the pain, trapping us in a cycle of doubt, blame, and fear.

This is what the Buddha so wisely pointed out with the allegory of the poisoned arrow. It's not the arrow itself that prolongs our suffering—it's our reaction to it. The first arrow, the unavoidable pain of life, is hard enough. But the second arrow, the one we aim at ourselves, is where the real suffering begins. It's the endless turning

over of questions we cannot answer, the clinging to what's already passed, and the refusal to let go. In essence, we twist the arrow ourselves, as if hoping the act will somehow bring clarity or relief. And yet, it doesn't.

I think the Buddha's teaching is an invitation to step back, to notice this tendency without judgment, and to realize that there's another way. Imagine what might happen if, instead of asking *why,* we simply acknowledged *what is.* The pain is here, yes. The wound is real. But does knowing every detail about the arrow—its origin, its material, its trajectory—change the fact that it has pierced us? Does that knowledge bring us any closer to healing?

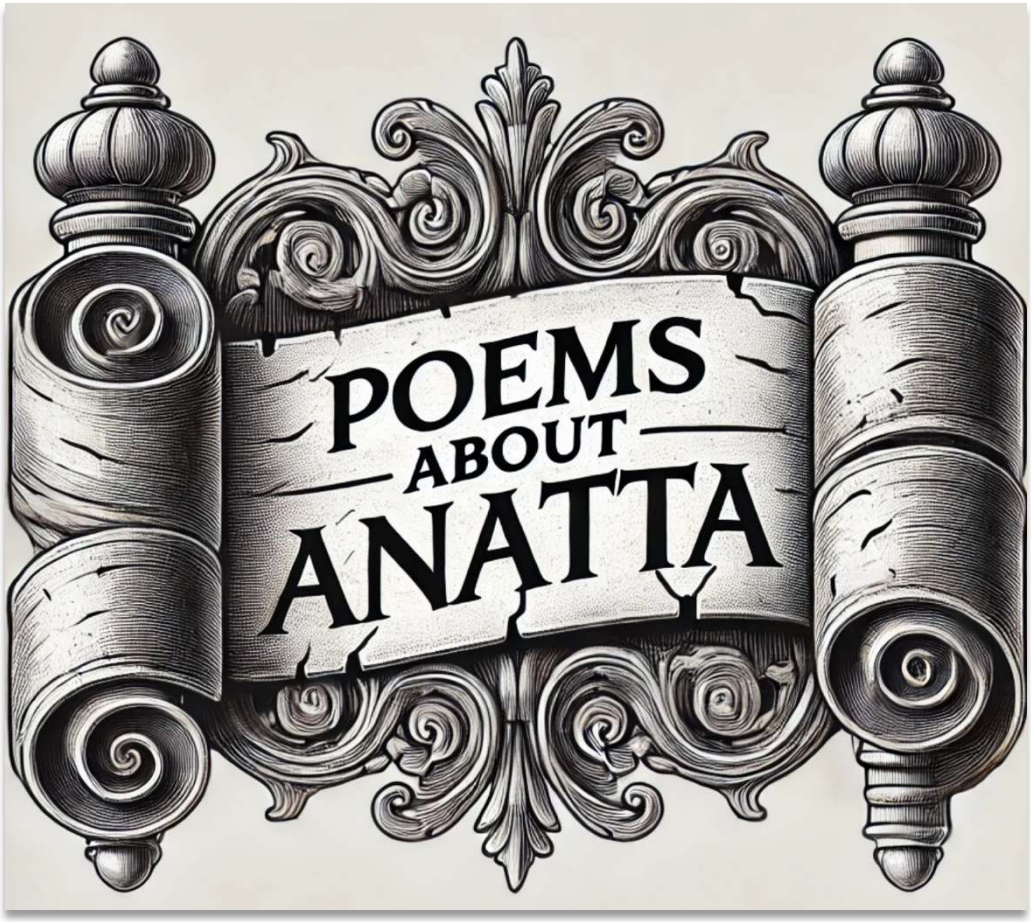
What would happen if we let go of those questions, not with a sense of giving up, but with a sense of turning toward what actually matters? In doing so, we might discover a profound truth: the present moment is where healing begins. It's not about ignoring the wound, but about tending to it with care and attention, without the burden of unnecessary stories. The breath becomes an anchor, the body a guide, and the mind a place where stillness can emerge even in the midst of discomfort.

The Buddha didn't offer this teaching as an abstraction. It's practical and immediate. When we stop feeding the flames of our anger, fear, or regret, the poison loses its grip. The wound can begin to heal—not because we've answered all our questions, but because we've allowed space for something deeper: acceptance, insight, and, ultimately, peace.

Life's arrows are inevitable, but suffering doesn't have to be. Each arrow, painful as it may be, carries an opportunity to transcend the habit of clinging and to see things as they truly are. The act of letting go isn't passive; it's an active, courageous choice to step out of the stories we tell ourselves and into the truth of the moment. And in that truth, we might just find the freedom and clarity we've been seeking all along.

So perhaps the question isn't *why* this arrow, or *who* sent it, but rather: *What is this moment asking of me?* The answer isn't out there. It's here, in the breath, in the present, and in the quiet wisdom of simply being.

2024 – Panna Foundation Publishing – R.S., Contributor


POEMS
ABOUT
ANATTA

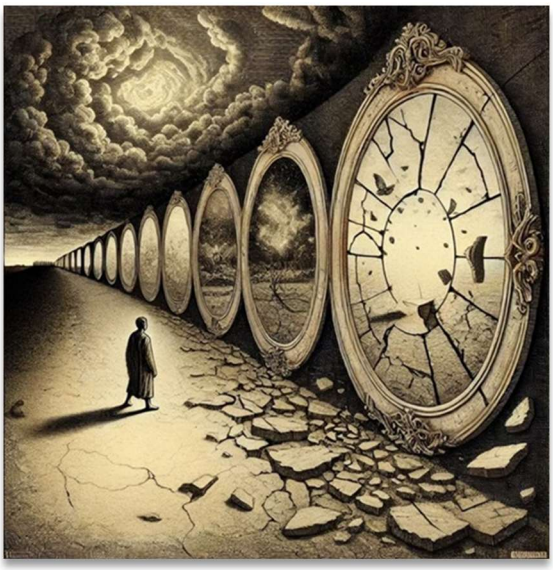
Poems About Anatta

Following is a series of poems written by Dīpabhasadhamma that reflect on the Buddha's teachings of **anatta**. In his teachings, the Buddha illuminated the nature of reality and the human experience, emphasizing that the belief in a permanent, unchanging self is a delusion that leads to suffering. The concept of **anatta**, often translated as the concept of "not-self," which reveals that what we conventionally call "self" is, in truth, a collection of ever-changing physical and mental phenomena—form, feeling, perception, mental formations, and consciousness—none of which can be identified as a stable, independent entity. The Buddha taught this concept of not-self (**anatta**) not as a metaphysical doctrine, but as a practical path to guide people toward the eventual freedom and release from suffering, encouraging us to see through the illusion of self and to let go of the clinging, craving, and aversion that arise from it.

Understanding **anatta** is central to overcoming the cycles of dissatisfaction and suffering, commonly known as **dukkha**, that bind us. By observing how attachment to the idea of "me" and "mine" creates conflict, fear, and dissatisfaction, we can begin to unburden the heart and mind. The Buddha's teachings on **anatta** are not intended to diminish life's value, but to expand our understanding of its interdependent and impermanent nature. When we release the grip on the notion of a fixed self, we open to the vastness of life, unbound by ego, and discover a profound freedom and peace that comes from alignment with reality.

These poems explore the subtle and profound truths of **anatta**, guiding the reader to reflect on their own experiences and perceptions. They serve as an invitation to contemplate the liberating wisdom of the Buddha's teachings, and to move toward a life free from the constraints of self-centered thought and suffering.

Mirage of Me & Mine



In the mirage of "mine," the hands grasp tight,
Clutching shadows that flicker, fading from sight.
Fear murmurs, "Hold on, for all will dissolve,"
While craving stirs, with no end to resolve.

The self builds a fortress, tall and austere,
Walls of reflection, isolating and sheer.
Each prize claimed adds weight to the strain,
Yet the higher it climbs, the deeper the pain.

A word cuts sharp, piercing the veil,
Defensiveness rises, a brittle shell.
The "I" strikes back, to shield its pride,
Yet peace slips further, nowhere to hide.

But the one who sees the self as air,
Lets the blow pass without despair.
Criticism falls like rain on the sea,
Dissolving into equanimity.

Loss arrives, uninvited, unkind,
Taking treasures the self entwined.
Despair floods the heart, an endless night,
The "mine" now empty, eclipsed by its plight.

But the one who knows all things must wane,
Greets loss with grace, feels no disdain.
Like autumn leaves that drift and part,
Acceptance blooms within the heart.

The climb for success, a feverish chase,
Each step frantic, an unwinnable race.
Outcomes grip the mind with force,
Joy subsumed by the strain of the course.

Yet the one unbound, no self to bind,
Moves with ease, leaves stress behind.
In effort itself, joy takes its root,
Unconcerned with the yield of the fruit.

Oh traveler, tread lightly, the path is clear:
To see through the self dispels all fear.
For the sky holds no walls, no treasures to bind,
And the one who releases finds peace of mind.

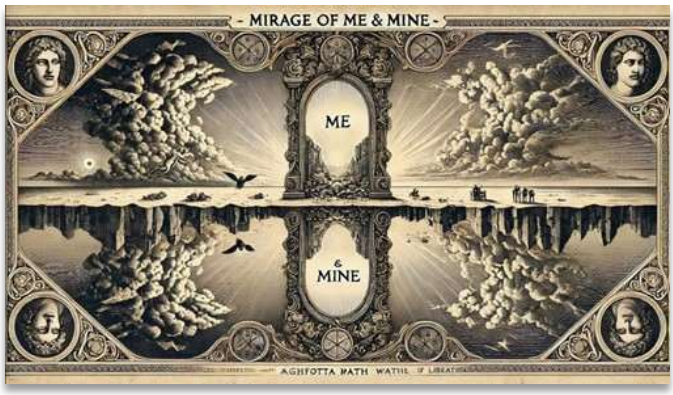


Image Symbolism of the Poem "Mirage of Me and Mine"

What a striking complement this image is to the poem "***Mirage of Me and Mine***." It serves as a searing allegory for the themes laid bare in the poem, tying the abstract notions of selfhood and attachment to haunting, visceral symbols. Each element of the image amplifies the poem's meditation on the illusion of "me and mine," creating a visual narrative that both challenges and elucidates.

The row of mirrors immediately draws attention, each one depicting a distorted reflection or broken shards. This is no coincidence; the mirrors act as a metaphor for the self's endless quest for validation and permanence. As the poem laments: "*The self builds a fortress, tall and austere, / Walls of reflection, isolating and sheer*." These mirrors do not show reality but rather fragmented illusions of identity, a perfect representation of how the ego splinters under the weight of its own delusions. The largest mirror, shattered and crumbling, conveys the ultimate truth: the self, like the mirror, cannot withstand the forces of impermanence.

The pathway of cracked ground along which the solitary figure walks speak to the precarious nature of clinging to these illusions. Each step forward leads further away from the false stability promised by the mirrors. This resonates with the lines: "*Loss arrives, uninvited, unkind, / Taking treasures the self entwined*." The broken ground suggests the fragility of attachment—how easily it crumbles beneath the weight of reality. And yet, the path persists, symbolizing the possibility of moving forward, of release.

The solitary figure, robed and contemplative, embodies the seeker mentioned in the poem. This individual walks away from the distortion of the mirrors, leaving behind the "walls of reflection" in pursuit of something greater—perhaps the sky above, vast and unbound, represents the freedom found in relinquishing attachment. The poem's closing wisdom, "*To see through the self dispels all fear*," comes alive in this lone figure's journey. By turning away from the mirrors, the seeker demonstrates the courage to face the truth of impermanence and the liberation it offers.

Above, swirling clouds dominate the sky, mirroring the chaos of the ego's endless grasping. Yet, their swirling forms suggest movement, transition, and change—a visual echo of the poem's insistence on the impermanent nature of all things: "*For the sky holds no walls, no treasures to bind*." The sky, though turbulent, remains vast and open, a stark contrast to the confining reflections of the mirrors. It invites the viewer to look beyond the illusions and toward a broader understanding of existence.

The shattered glass scattered across the ground is a poignant detail. Each shard reflects a tiny piece of the world, fractured and incomplete, much like the ego's understanding of itself. The poem captures this brilliantly: "*Criticism falls like rain on the sea, / Dissolving into equanimity*." The shattered glass reminds us of the futility of clinging to the false narrative of the self—an identity built on fragile reflections.

In this image, the viewer finds a visual meditation on the core teachings of the Buddha, as distilled through the poem. It asks us to confront the futility of attachment, to see through the illusion of self, and to embrace the journey toward equanimity and freedom. Together, the poem and image deliver a message that is as unflinching as it is transformative: the self, no matter how tightly we cling to it, is but a mirage. And it is only in letting go that we can truly find peace. **2024 – Panna Foundation Publishing – B.F.**

Sand and Storm

The tighter the grip, the faster it slips,
Like sand through clenched fingers, grain by grain.
The self whispers, "Hold it, keep it, secure,"
Yet nothing remains, nothing endures.

The storm rolls in, fierce and unbound,
Walls of certainty tremble, then fall to the ground.
"I can master this," the self proclaims,
Yet the wind pays no heed to its fragile claims.

A friend drifts away, their path diverged,
The heart clings, aching, unwilling to merge.
"Stay as you were," the self implores,
Yet change is the rhythm life restores.

A plan unravels, the perfect design,
Each thread loosens despite the mind.
The self demands, "Control it, steer,"
But the course shifts, unheeding the fear.

Yet in the letting go, a space appears,
Free from the weight of imagined fears.
The hands unburdened, the mind unwound,
The storm softens, the sand feels profound.

For what is control but a fleeting disguise?
An illusion the self clutches, and then denies.
Oh seeker, release, let the tide ebb and flow—
In surrender, the boundless truth you'll know.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Sand and Storm"

This image, created by Dīpabhasadhamma, resonates profoundly with the poem *"Sands and Storms,"* visually capturing the essence of impermanence and the futility of clinging. The central figure, a robed monk releasing grains of sand into the air, becomes a powerful representation of the poem's thematic refrain: *"The tighter the grip, the faster it slips, / Like sand through clenched fingers, grain by grain."* His deliberate action of letting the sand fall mirrors the poem's invitation to release attachment and embrace the transient nature of existence. The sand, ephemeral and weightless, is a poignant symbol of the self's futile attempts to hold onto the impermanent.

The collapsing walls in the background reinforce the imagery of crumbling certainty, echoing the stanza: *"The storm rolls in, fierce and unbound, / Walls of certainty tremble, then fall to the ground."* These broken walls represent the self's constructs—relationships, plans, and illusions of control—that inevitably succumb to the winds of change. The stormy sky adds to this visual metaphor, suggesting the emotional turbulence and resistance that accompanies the realization of impermanence.

The interplay between the monk's serenity and the chaos of the crumbling walls symbolizes the transformative shift described in the poem: *"Yet in the letting go, a space appears, / Free from the weight of imagined fears."* While the external world succumbs to disorder, the monk remains untroubled, embodying the wisdom of surrender. This duality—between storm and calm, destruction and peace—illustrates the journey from clinging to release, from suffering to understanding.

The ocean in the distance adds another layer to the imagery. It is vast, rhythmic, and timeless, mirroring the poem's final lines: *"Oh seeker, release, let the tide ebb and flow— / In surrender, the boundless truth you'll know."* The waves symbolize the natural ebb and flow of life, indifferent to human attempts at control. By releasing the sand to the wind, the monk aligns himself with this natural rhythm, finding freedom in acceptance.

The birds soaring through the sky above further underscore this theme of liberation. Their flight evokes a sense of transcendence, reflecting the lightness that comes when one lets go of the burdens of attachment. This visual, echoes the poem's conclusion, where surrender leads to a deeper understanding of life's boundless nature.

In its entirety, the image embodies the poem's message: the self's desperate grasping only deepens its suffering, but in letting go lies the path to freedom. Together, the image and poem create a meditative space for the viewer and reader, inviting them to reflect on the impermanence of life and the wisdom of release.

2024 – Panna Foundation Publishing – S.M., Editor

In the Mirror

In the mirror, the thought arises: "This is me."
Yet like a shadow cast by the sun,
It flickers, fades, and ceases to be—
A phantom claimed, but truly none.

The body shifts, its tides erode,
Each cell a moment, born and gone.
"Is form mine?" the Buddha asked, serene,
"Impermanent, unsatisfactory, unseen."

The self proclaims: "I am the core,
The one who suffers, the one who owns."
But the aggregates—what lies in store?
Form, feeling, thought—no self is shown.

"Feeling fades, perception drifts,
Mental formations rise and fall.
Can what is fleeting bring true gifts?
Or does it bind the heart in thrall?"

The Buddha spoke, with wisdom clear:
"Not self, not yours—observe, release.
In grasping lies the root of fear;
In letting go, the heart finds peace."

Why does it matter? The world burns bright,
With wars of "mine," with walls of "me."
A single flame ignites the fight,
Yet in no-self lies harmony.

"Be like the sky," his teachings say,
"Unbound, unbroken, vast and free.
Release the 'I,' the 'mine,' the 'they,'
And taste the depth of clarity."

A mirror gleams, its surface clear,
Reflecting a face both far and near.
The eyes gaze back, a question grows:
"Who am I in what this shows?"

The mind leaps in, weaves its thread:
"This face, this form, this life," it said.
But what is a face but fleeting guise,
A mask dissolving before the eyes?

"Feeling fades, perception drifts,
Mental formations rise and fall.
Can what is fleeting bring true gifts?
Or does it bind the heart in thrall?"

The mirror whispers, soft and still,
"Is what you see your deepest will?
The body, the thought, the fleeting view—
Can these define what's truly you?"

The Buddha spoke, with wisdom clear:
"Not self, not yours—observe, release.
In grasping lies the root of fear;
In letting go, the heart finds peace."

The face in the glass, a shifting frame,
Is not the self, nor holds its name.
It comes, it goes, a fleeting trace,
No more than light in mirrored space.

"Be like the sky," his teachings say,
"Unbound, unbroken, vast and free.
Release the 'I,' the 'mine,' the 'they,'
And taste the depth of clarity."

So, seeker, pause, let stillness teach—
What clings to form will surely fall.
The sky holds nothing, yet it reaches,
Infinite, open, embracing all.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "In the Mirror"

Dīpabhasadhamma beautifully aligns his artwork with the poem *"In the Mirror,"* visually capturing the essence of self-inquiry and the transient nature of identity, as described in the Buddha's teachings on anattā (not-self). At the center of the image is a massive, ornate mirror, its surface shattered and extending into a radiant light. This symbolizes the breaking of illusions and the dissolution of the constructed self, as referenced in the poem: *"The face in the glass, a shifting frame, / Is not the self, nor holds its name."* The mirror, though fractured, reflects the infinite, hinting at the vast and unbound reality that lies beyond the illusion of self.

The figure of the monk, standing contemplatively before the broken mirror, embodies the seeker described in the poem. His posture reflects introspection and surrender, resonating with the lines: *"A mirror gleams, its surface clear, / Reflecting a face both far and near."* The monk's solitary presence conveys the deeply personal journey of understanding impermanence and letting go of attachment to the ego.

The shattered pieces of the mirror scattered on the ground emphasize the poem's recurring theme of impermanence: *"Form, feeling, thought—no self is shown."* These shards, like the aggregates of body, feelings, and perceptions, are no longer united as a singular entity. Instead, they symbolize the disintegration of the illusion of the self, highlighting the futility of clinging to transient constructs.

The radiant light at the center of the mirror points to the ultimate realization of clarity and liberation, as described in the poem's closing lines: *"Be like the sky… Release the 'I,' the 'mine,' the 'they,' / And taste the depth of clarity."* This light is not bound by the mirror's frame, just as the realization of non-self is unbound by the physical or mental constraints of existence.

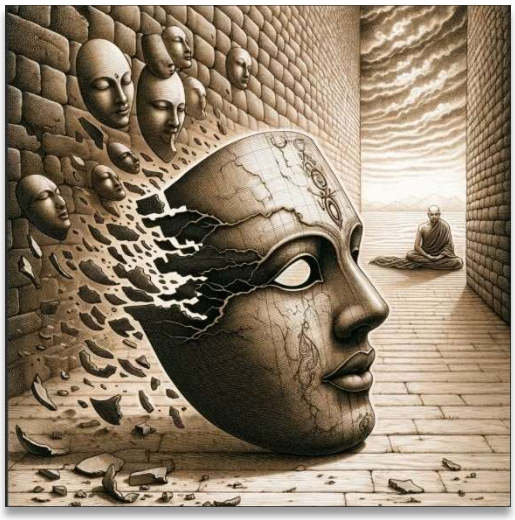
Further reinforcing the poem's metaphors, the butterfly in the foreground serves as a symbol of transformation and freedom. Its flight mirrors the lines: *"So, seeker, pause, let stillness teach— / What clings to form will surely fall."* Just as a butterfly emerges from its cocoon, the self, when released from clinging, finds liberation.

The vast, open sky behind the mirror reflects the poem's guidance to embrace boundlessness: *"Be like the sky… Infinite, open, embracing all."* This background suggests that beyond the shattered identity lies the freedom of vastness and interconnectedness, free from the illusions of "me" and "mine."

In sum, the image's intricate symbolism profoundly mirrors the poem's exploration of selflessness and impermanence. The mirror's shattering, the monk's quiet contemplation, and the radiant light together encapsulate the poem's central themes, inviting the viewer to reflect on the transient nature of self and the peace found in letting go.

2024 – Panna Foundation Publishing – S.M., Editor

Masks We Wear



In the quiet of morning, the mirror stares,
Reflecting a face weighed down by cares.
"I must be this, I must be that,"
A thousand masks, an endless act.'

The self says, "Stand apart, be unique,
Define your worth, the world must speak."
Yet every label, every name,
Chains the heart to a ceaseless game.

The job defines, the title secures,
Yet the climb to the top only ensures
The loss of joy, the cost of peace—
A hollow crown that will not cease.

In scrolling feeds, the self compares,
To faces framed in digital glares.
"Am I enough?" the question burns,
As the craving grows, and contentment turns.

A parent bends beneath their role,
A friend conceals the doubts they hold.
The weight of "I" demands its due,
Splitting the mind, fracturing the view.

But the Buddha spoke: "These roles, this name—
A fleeting mask in life's brief game.
Not who you are, not yours to keep;
Let go, and find the stillness deep."

What is individuality but a wall,
Built brick by brick to stand apart?
Yet within those walls, we feel so small,
A fortress that breaks the human heart.

Release the mask, dissolve the name,
Step beyond the need for fame.
The weight you bear, the self you guard,
Was never real, never so hard.

Oh seeker, rest, let being flow,
For in the letting go, you'll know:
The sky holds all, yet claims no place,
Its vastness full, its boundless grace.

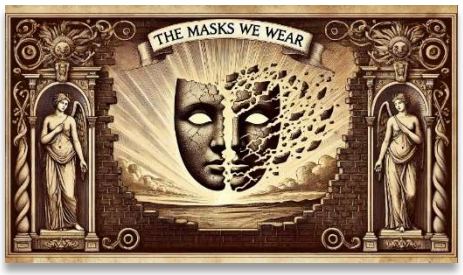


Image Symbolism of the Poem "The Masks We Wear"

When I first looked at this image, I felt as if it's speaking directly to the heart of what I've spent my life trying to understand. That mask, with its intricate design, cracking and falling apart—it reminds me of how we cling to identities, roles, and stories about who we think we are. We put so much energy into maintaining these masks, don't we? But look at it—it's breaking anyway. That's what happens. We can't stop it. The picture helps me to understand that at the moment we stop trying to hold it all together is when we actually touch freedom. The poem captures it so well: *"A thousand masks, an endless act."* That's what it feels like, doesn't it? Exhausting. Endless. And ultimately, hollow.

Those smaller masks, floating off into the distance—they're like all the versions of ourselves we've tried on over the years, hoping one of them will finally feel right. But none of them ever do, do they? They might fit for a while, but they don't last. The poem's lines—*"What is individuality but a wall, / Built brick by brick to stand apart?"*—hit home for me. We build these walls, thinking they'll protect us, but all they do is keep us separate, alone, and weighed down by the effort of holding them up. It's such a poignant image, isn't it? The monk sitting there, still and calm, while the walls and the mask crumble. He's not clinging. He's not resisting. He's just being. That's the possibility this image offers—to let go of the need to keep it all together and simply rest in what's already here.

And the cracks in the mask—those are beautiful to me. They're not failures. They're openings. They're the places where the light gets in. The poem says it perfectly: *"Release the mask, dissolve the name, / Step beyond the need for fame*." That's what this image is asking of us. Let the mask break. Let the walls fall. It's only when we stop clinging to who we think we're supposed to be that we can actually discover who we really are. And who is that? Well, not some fixed identity, that's for sure. It's more like the sky in the background of the image—vast, open, and boundless. The poem says, "*The sky holds all, yet claims no place*." That's what freedom feels like. Spacious. Unburdened.

I also notice the monk isn't judging the broken mask or the crumbling walls. He's just sitting, present, observing it all. We don't have to fix the broken pieces. We don't have to glue the mask back together or rebuild the walls. We can just let it all fall apart and trust that there's something deeper waiting on the other side. The cracks, the crumbles, the falling away—they're not the end. They're the beginning. The poem puts it so beautifully: *"Oh seeker, rest, let being flow, / For in the letting go, you'll know."*

This image, for me, is an invitation isn't it? An invitation to stop clinging, stop striving, and just let go. To see the beauty in the breaking. To find peace not in holding on, but in letting go. That's where freedom is. And if you can sit, like that monk, and watch it all unfold without needing to fix or fight it—well, that's where life truly begins.

2024 – For Panna Foundation Publishing – A.B.M.

Threads of Infinity

The leaf falls, a silent descent,
Its journey woven with wind and earth.
No self claims it, no voice laments,
Yet in its fall, a new life's birth.

A child cries, and across the hall,
Another's heart begins to ache.
The self dissolves, the walls grow thin,
When pain shared makes compassion awake.

In the marketplace, hands exchange,
Goods and glances, smiles and strife.
Each act a thread, unseen, arranged,
Binding strangers in the loom of life.

You drink from the river, but do you see?
The rain that fed it crossed mountains high.
A single drop knows no boundary,
It moves, it mingles, it never asks why.

The self declares, “I stand alone,
Separate, solid, apart from the rest.”
But the breath you take was once unknown,
A gift passed on, a silent bequest.

The Buddha taught: "No self contains,
No single thread completes the weave.
Each moment flows, each being sustains,
In letting go, we truly receive."

Oh seeker, pause, and feel the weight
Of clinging to "I," of claiming your name.
The trees breathe with you, the stars await,
To remind you, no self plays this game.

A hand outstretched finds its pair,
A voice in sorrow finds its song.
In knowing this, all life lays bare:
No self stands; together, we belong.

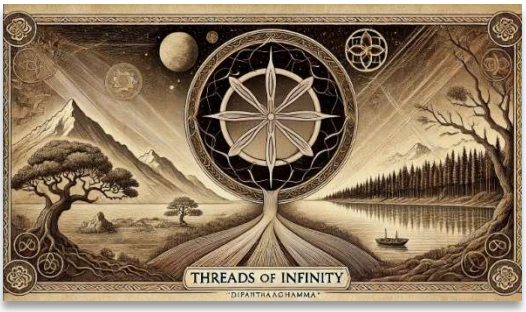


Image Symbolism of the Poem "Threads of Infinity"

"Threads of Infinity"—a fitting title, don't you think? This image practically howls with the kind of interconnectedness that the Buddha was so fond of discussing. And yet, it does so without the celestial theatrics of divine puppeteers pulling strings. No, this is something far grander, and simultaneously more humbling. It's the universe's quiet, unsentimental web, where every thread—every root, ripple, and drop—sustains existence without needing anyone's permission or applause.

Take the monk standing at the edge of this cosmic tapestry, gazing toward the infinite. He's not wrapped in the trappings of solitude, though his silhouette might suggest so. Instead, he's immersed in a kind of symphony of interbeing, as the poem itself declares: "*No self contains, / No single thread completes the weave*." That monk, small yet significant, is a reflection of every one of us—participants in a much larger story, whether we acknowledge it or not.

The luminous geometry in the sky—the overlapping circles, the patterns that seem to expand endlessly—captures the Buddha's core message: there is no solid, permanent self at the center of anything. Each circle flows into the next, just as "*Each act a thread, unseen, arranged, / Binding strangers in the loom of life.*" And let's talk about those roots sprawling deep into the earth. They're not just decorative. They shout, quite poetically, that nothing—absolutely nothing—stands apart. The roots drink in sustenance, just as the river winds its way through the valley, nourishing the unseen and the unheralded.

Now, notice the river itself. That meandering flow is no mere backdrop; it's a reminder of the lines: "You drink from the river, but do you see? / The rain that fed it crossed mountains high." The water doesn't belong to anyone, and yet it belongs to everyone. The image dares us to acknowledge that our boundaries—our "I" and "mine"—are nothing more than fanciful illusions. The river doesn't stop to demand credit, just as the rain doesn't ask where it's headed. It simply flows, and that is its truth.

Even the cosmic bodies above—the stars and planets—refuse to remain aloof. They're threaded into this story, too. The heavens here aren't regal spectators but participants, their light woven into the fabric of existence, as the poem beautifully whispers: "*The trees breathe with you, the stars await, / To remind you, no self plays this game*."

And yet, for all this grandeur, the image doesn't lose itself in abstraction. Look closer, and you'll see the earth-bound life—the animals, the forest, the roots themselves—all anchored in this infinite interplay. This is not a lecture on cosmic insignificance; it's a celebration of radical belonging. Every atom in this picture is a quiet rebellion against the self-important, individualist narrative. The poem, in its understated brilliance, captures this perfectly: "*The self declares, 'I stand alone,' / But the breath you take was once unknown*."

If there's one thing this image gets utterly right, it's that it doesn't ask us to worship the web—it invites us to see ourselves in it. To accept, as the Buddha said, that *"In letting go, we truly receive."* Let the monk keep his solitary stance; he's not alone, and neither are you. In the end, this image and the poem are not just about observing the threads of infinity but about realizing you're already part of them. There's no escape from that truth—and, frankly, who would want to escape such profound liberation?

2024 –Panna Foundation Publishing – B.F.

What is Truly Owned?

The hand clutches tight, a fragile shell,
"This is mine," it whispers, compelled.
Yet the gold slips through, the treasure fades,
The grasping hand finds only shades.

The house, the car, the field you till,
Are they yours, or time's to spill?
The self declares, "I own, I keep,"
Yet each will crumble, fall to sleep.

The heart claims people, calls them "mine,"
A child, a lover, a friend divine.
But bonds will loosen, paths will part,
No chain can bind a fleeting heart.

The Buddha asked, “Can you possess
What rises, changes, fades to less?
Form, feeling, thought—can you hold
What flows and slips, too wild, too old?”

You drink from the river, but it flows on,
The water you held is already gone.
You claim the land, the sky, the sea,
Yet none can be owned, not even "me."

The self builds walls to keep and defend,
Yet walls erode, and all must end.
In letting go, the burden fades,
And freedom grows where clinging wanes.

Oh seeker, reflect: what is yours to own?
The body? A moment, borrowed, alone.
The mind? A tempest, fleeting, unbound.
In release, the eternal is found.

To own is to fear, to cling is to lose,
But to let go is the path to choose.
For what is not yours cannot be taken,
And in no-self, life’s peace awakens.

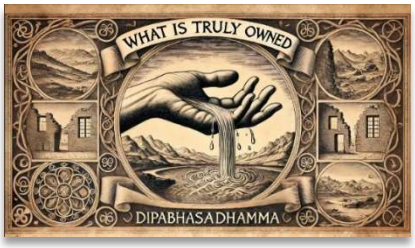


Image Symbolism of the Poem "What is Truly Owned"

Let me take you on a journey, as if we were sitting together, contemplating this image over tea. As I look at it, I see something profoundly familiar—a hand, sculpted with such care, reaching out, as if to claim something. And yet, what is it really grasping? The water flows through its fingers, as water always does, unbothered by the hand's attempts to contain it. And isn't that just like life? We stretch out our hands, clinging to the illusion of ownership, thinking, this is mine, I have it now. But, of course, we never really do.

The water slipping away reminds me of the lines from the poem: *"You drink from the river, but it flows on, / The water you held is already gone."* We think we hold the river, but what we hold is already something else. The river isn't ours to keep, and it never was. And yet, we try—oh, how we try. The gears and roots within the hand—they are our constructs, aren't they? Our elaborate mechanisms of possession, the stories we tell ourselves to make sense of a world that refuses to be pinned down. And here's the paradox: the more we build, the more we grasp, the further away we get from what is true.

Looking closer, I see the monk by the river. He is not grasping. He is sitting there, quietly observing, present in the moment. What wisdom in his stillness! He does not try to own the river, nor does he demand that it flow any particular way. He simply watches, allowing it to be as it is. This, I think, is what the poem means when it says, *"In letting go, the burden fades, / And freedom grows where clinging wanes."* The monk knows, as I have often said, that the harder you clutch at something, the more it escapes you. To grasp at life is to miss it entirely.

And then, there's the vastness of the landscape. It stretches out endlessly, as if to remind us of the futility of trying to own what is infinite. The birds soar freely, the rocks crumble, the river winds on without a care. The world does not belong to us, nor does it ask for our permission to change. The poem captures this so perfectly: *"The house, the car, the field you till, / Are they yours, or time's to spill?"* Ownership is a trick we play on ourselves, a fragile narrative we cling to, hoping it will bring us security. But the truth is, security comes not from clinging, but from letting go.

And then there's that question, etched into the image itself: *"What is truly owned."* It's not a question to answer with logic, of course. It's an invitation to look deeper, to see the illusion for what it is. We don't own the river, the land, or even our own bodies. We don't need to. When we let go of the idea of ownership, we find something much more profound—a connection to everything. As the poem says, *"To own is to fear, to cling is to lose, / But to let go is the path to choose."*

As I sit here reflecting on this image, I feel it offering the same teaching the river offers the monk. Ownership is an illusion, a shadow cast by the mind. But life is not diminished by this realization—it is enriched. When you let go of trying to hold the water, you find yourself flowing with it. And in that flow, you discover the peace you were always seeking. It's a beautiful irony, isn't it? By owning nothing, you gain everything. That, my friends, is the wisdom I see in Dīpabhasadhamma's picture here.

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Shadows of the Clock

The clock ticks softly, a steady refrain,
Marking moments that cannot remain.
The self declares, "I am, I'll endure,"
Yet each tick whispers, "Nothing is sure."

Youth clings to beauty, fresh as the dawn,
But the mirror tells where time has gone.
Lines etch the face, gray streaks the hair,
A quiet truth: all fades, all wears.

The mind, it holds its stories tight,
Of victories won and fears at night.
Yet memories shift, their edges blur,
What once was sharp becomes unsure.

The Buddha asked, "Can what is born
Escape decay, escape the storm?"
The self, it seeks to anchor its name,
But time dissolves each fleeting claim.

A castle built on shifting sand,
No walls remain, no king can stand.
The self cries out, "Let time obey!"
But the tide sweeps all thrones away.

The flowers bloom, then drift to dust,
The stars burn bright, then yield their crust.
All that begins must surely end,
And time reveals what we defend.

Oh seeker, look to the river's flow:
No moment lingers, no time to stow.
To grasp at permanence is to lose,
But to let it pass is the path to choose.

In seeing this, no chains remain,
No fear of loss, no futile strain.
The self dissolves in time's embrace,
And freedom blooms in empty space.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Shadows of the Clock"

Among the many images Dīpabhasadhamma's has created for his poems, the one for the poem "*Shadows of the Clock,"* I find to be a particularly striking visual meditation on impermanence, the relentless passage of time, and the liberation found in letting go. At its center is an antique clock, its shadowy hands dissolving into flowing water. This central motif, inspired by the poem's opening lines—*"The clock ticks softly, a steady refrain, / Marking moments that cannot remain"*—vividly portrays the fleeting nature of time. The flowing water reinforces this imagery, echoing the verse *"Oh seeker, look to the river's flow: / No moment lingers, no time to stow."* Together, these elements create a powerful reminder that time cannot be grasped or stopped.

Surrounding the clock are fading flowers and a crumbling castle, each symbolizing a different aspect of transience. The flowers reflect the fragility of beauty and youth, drawing directly from the lines *"Youth clings to beauty, fresh as the dawn, / But the mirror tells where time has gone."* As they fade and drift to dust, they remind us of the inevitability of aging and the passing of all things. The crumbling castle, meanwhile, symbolizes the futility of human ambition and the illusion of permanence. This detail aligns with the poem's warning about constructs built on unstable foundations: *"A castle built on shifting sand, / No walls remain, no king can stand."* These elements together highlight the impermanence of both personal and material achievements.

A serene monk stands to one side of the scene, observing the transience around them with calm wisdom. This figure embodies the Buddha's teachings on acceptance and non-attachment, reflecting the lines *"In seeing this, no chains remain, / No fear of loss, no futile strain."* The monk's presence offers a visual counterbalance to the transient elements, symbolizing the peace that arises from understanding and embracing impermanence.

The background transitions from the grounded elements of the clock and castle to an expansive, starlit sky. This transition mirrors the poem's final revelation: *"The self dissolves in time's embrace, / And freedom blooms in empty space."* The open sky, vast and boundless, symbolizes liberation and clarity, reinforcing the idea that in releasing attachment to the self and the illusion of permanence, one can find true freedom.

Every detail in the image is intricately tied to the verses of the poem, creating a cohesive and evocative narrative. The flowing water, fading flowers, crumbling castle, and serene monk all work together to visually express the poem's profound reflections on the nature of time and the path to liberation. The image not only complements the poem but deepens its impact, offering viewers a contemplative and symbolic exploration of life's impermanence.

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Walls of Me and You

The self draws lines, sharp and clear,
"This is mine; keep out, stay near."
It builds its walls with "us" and "them,"
Casting stones from a fragile hem.

A word offends, a glance divides,
The self ignites, the heart collides.
"How dare they!" it cries, with wounded pride,
Fanning flames that burn inside.

In families, nations, and lovers' spats,
The self demands its tit for tat.
Each conflict born of a single seed:
The self's endless hunger, its boundless need.

The Buddha saw, with eyes serene:
“This conflict comes from what is seen
As ‘I,’ as ‘mine,’ as ‘this must be,’
But none of these are truly free.”

Look to the forest, where trees entwine,
Each root supports, no boundary defined.
The wind it whispers, "I hold no claim;
I touch all freely, without a name."

Yet the self clings tight, “I am the core,
I must defend, I must have more!”
And so the quarrels stretch and grow,
A river of strife with no end to flow.

But what dissolves when self is none?
The need to win, the need to shun.
The walls fall silent, the heart expands,
Peace emerges with open hands.

Oh seeker, step beyond the fight,
For no self means no need for might.
The sky holds all, it takes no side,
In its vast embrace, all worlds abide.

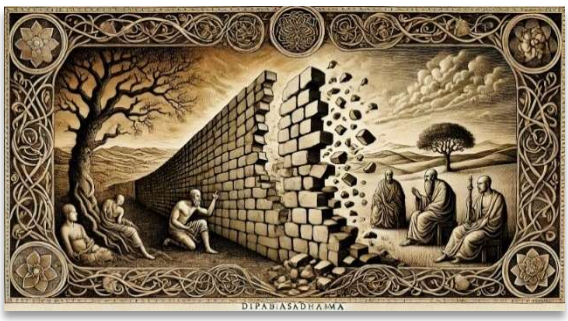

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Walls of Me and You"

In Dīpabhasadhamma's image, created for the poem: "The Walls of Me and You," he uses deeply symbolic representation of the themes of division, attachment, and liberation found in the poem. This image serves as a powerful visual representation of the divisions created by the self and the liberation found in letting go of those boundaries. The central focus is a crumbling wall, stretching across a vast landscape. The wall, with its bricks falling and dissolving into the air, embodies the poem's opening lines: "The self draws lines, sharp and clear, / 'This is mine; keep out, stay near.'" This wall represents the boundaries of "us" versus "them," constructed by the self to protect and defend its sense of identity. The gradual collapse of the wall symbolizes the dissolution of these divisions, as expressed in the poem: "But what dissolves when self is none? / The need to win, the need to shun."

On one side of the wall, a solitary figure sits, clinging to the constructs of possession and division. This figure represents the ego-driven self, fearful of losing its perceived separateness. The figure aligns with the lines: "The self clings tight, 'I am the core, / I must defend, I must have more!'" It captures the self's endless hunger for control and validation, perpetuating conflict and isolation.

On the opposite side, serene monk's gazes at the crumbling wall. The monks symbolize wisdom and detachment, embodying the Buddha's teachings referenced in the poem: "The Buddha saw, with eyes serene: / 'This conflict comes from what is seen / As 'I,' as 'mine,' as 'this must be.'" The monk's presence reflects the peace that arises when one sees through the illusion of self and recognizes the interconnectedness of all things.

Above the scene, the Buddhist eight-spoke wheel of the Noble Eightfold Path hovers prominently, symbolizing the path to liberation and the teachings that guide one away from attachment and division. This detail connects to the poem's reminder of the possibility of unity and harmony beyond the walls of self: "Look to the forest, where trees entwine, / Each root supports, no boundary defined."

The background of the image reinforces the poem's thematic journey. On one side, the landscape is barren and stark, reflecting the isolation and sterility of a life dominated by self-created divisions. On the other side, the scene transitions to an intertwined forest and a vast, open sky, illustrating the unity and freedom that arise when the self dissolves. These elements mirror the closing lines of the poem: "The sky holds all, it takes no side, / In its vast embrace, all worlds abide."

This image masterfully translates the poem's exploration of division and liberation into visual form. Each element—from the crumbling wall to the contrasting figures and the symbolic wheel—works together to invite viewers to reflect on their own boundaries and the freedom that comes with letting them go. It is both a poignant and contemplative depiction of the struggle and serenity inherent in dismantling the "walls of me and you."

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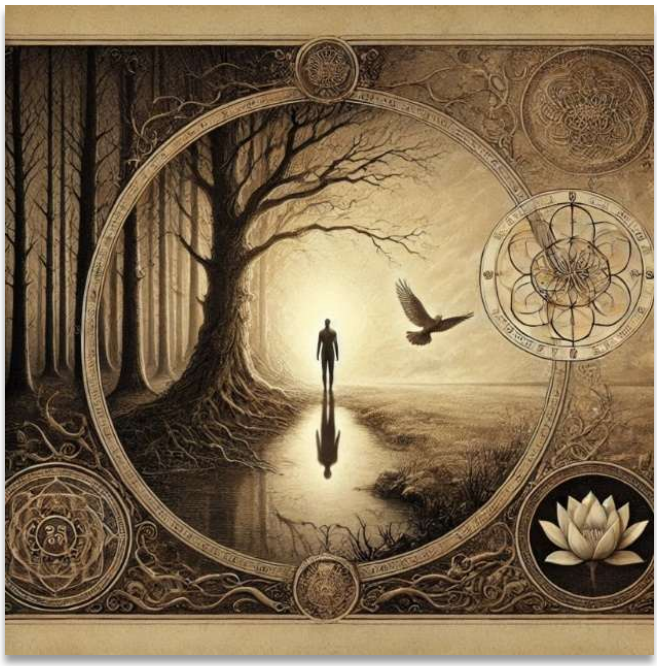
The Shadow of Fear



Fear speaks loud, a voice inside,
"Protect the self, conceal, and hide."
It builds its armor, thick and cold,
To shield a story it cannot hold.

The self cries out, "I must not fall!
I must preserve, defend it all!"
Yet what is there that truly stays?
A fleeting shadow, a passing haze.

The fear of loss, the fear of blame,
The endless fight to guard a name.
A trembling hand, a hurried breath,
A life ensnared by fear of death.

But the Buddha asked, "What is this self,
This fragile thing that hides on a shelf?
Is it the body? It fades with time.
Is it the mind? A shifting rhyme."

The fear you feel is built on sand,
A house that crumbles at a touch of hand.
When no self clings, no fear can bind,
For nothing is lost where none can find.

A bird takes flight with empty claws,
Unburdened, free, it knows no loss.
So too, the one who sees through fear,
Walks light, unbound, the path made clear.

Oh seeker, let the armor fall,
It shields no truth, no self at all.
Fear melts away like morning mist,
When nothing is clutched, nothing is missed.

Step beyond the shadow's edge,
Into the light, beyond the hedge.
Where fear once whispered, now is peace—
In no-self lies the heart's release.

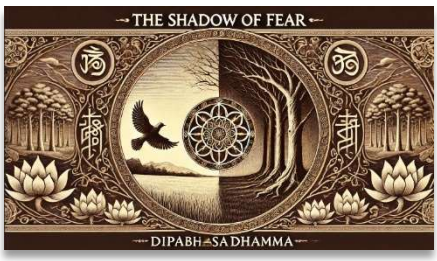


Image Symbolism of the Poem "The Shadow of Fear"

Each image that Dīpabhasadhamma creates seems more interesting each time. I believe his art shows a deep respect and uncanny insight into the teachings of the Buddha. This is definitely so with the image for the poem "The Shadow of Fear," which offers a visually rich and symbolic interpretation of the poem's journey from fear to liberation. At the heart of the image is a shadowy figure standing at the edge of a dark forest. This figure represents the self's instinct to retreat and protect itself, caught between the shadowy entanglements of fear and the light of understanding breaking through. It directly reflects the poem's opening lines: "*Fear speaks loud, a voice inside, / 'Protect the self, conceal, and hide.*" The figure's stance at the boundary of darkness and light illustrates the tension between clinging to fear and stepping into clarity.

Emerging from the mist, a soft light breaks through, illuminating the figure and the landscape. This light symbolizes the dissolution of fear, a reminder that fear itself is based on illusion. The poem captures this beautifully in the lines: "*The fear you feel is built on sand, / A house that crumbles at a touch of hand.*" The light, slowly clearing the mist, echoes the verse: "*Fear melts away like morning mist, / When nothing is clutched, nothing is missed.*" It serves as a beacon of understanding, pointing toward freedom from the grip of fear.

Nearby, a bird takes flight with empty claws, soaring into the open sky. The bird embodies the unburdened freedom that comes with letting go of attachments. Its presence perfectly reflects the lines: *"A bird takes flight with empty claws, / Unburdened, free; it knows no loss.*" The bird's graceful flight reminds us that freedom comes when the self stops clinging to impermanent things and recognizes its own insubstantiality: "*When no self clings, no fear can bind, / For nothing is lost where none can find.*"

The background transitions from a dark, tangled forest to a bright, open meadow. This shift in the landscape captures the journey from fear to peace, mirroring the poem's guidance: "*Step beyond the shadow's edge, / Into the light, beyond the hedge*." The meadow, bathed in serene light, represents the calm and clarity found when fear and attachment dissolve, aligning with the poem's conclusion: *"Where fear once whispered, now is peace— / In no-self lies the heart's release.*"

Above it all, the eight-spoke wheel of the Noble Eightfold Path is subtly integrated into the sky. This symbol ties the image to the Buddha's teachings, reminding viewers of the path to liberation. It evokes the lines: "The Buddha asked, '*What is this self, / This fragile thing that hides on a shelf?*" The wheel provides an anchor, representing the wisdom that guides one beyond fear and into clarity.

Altogether, this image vividly captures the poem's central message. From the shadowy figure and the soft light to the bird in flight and the transitioning landscape, every element contributes to the narrative of moving from the grip of fear to the freedom of no-self. It invites viewers to reflect on their own fears and defenses and to imagine the peace that lies beyond. I found this poem to be particularly insightful, as-well-as humbling and direct.

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The Weightless Way

The hands release, the burden falls,
What once was grasped now freely calls.
No chains of "mine," no walls to defend,
In the letting go, the heart can mend.

The self once clung to fleeting gain,
To name and form, to pleasure, to pain.
Each moment grasped was gone too soon,
A chasing shadow beneath the moon.

The Buddha taught: "What clings will bind,
What lets go frees the heart and mind."
For craving builds a world of strain,
But release dissolves the need to attain.

The morning dew, a fleeting gem,
Evaporates in the sun's bright hymn.
To clutch the dew is to hold despair,
But to marvel, unbound, brings joy to the air.

A life unburdened flows like a stream,
No need to capture, no fixed dream.
Each turn it takes, each stone it meets,
A rhythm of freedom, a pulse that repeats.

Oh seeker, step light, the world is vast,
What is not clung to is never past.
The open hand feels every breeze,
Unburdened by grasp, content with ease.

In letting go, no less remains,
But a quiet joy where no self reigns.
For what is life but a fleeting art,
Dancing free when freed from heart.

So, walk the way, untethered, clear,
The path of release dispels all fear.
Where clinging ends, the world feels wide,
And the joy of no-self abides inside.

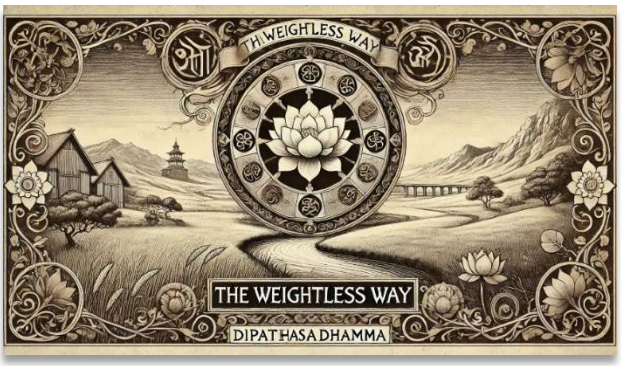

Image Symbolism of the Poem "The Weightless Way"

This image holds a special place for me, not just as its creator but, like everyone, I too am someone who continues to live and wrestle with the themes it explores. Both an offering and a reflection—I wanted this image to be a visual expression of the freedom and lightness that come when we release the burdens of attachment. For me, this image is deeply personal because it represents the intimate process of *learning* to let go, not as a distant ideal, but as a lived daily and ongoing practice. My first encounter with the Eightfold Path; the first time I read it, I was immediately taken in by its majesty, its wisdom and its simplicity. So, at the center of this image is the Eightfold Noble Path, cradled by open hands. I drew these hands with great care because they embody the moment of surrender—the willingness to release what we so tightly grip in order to feel the weightlessness of freedom. They hold nothing—a concept and yet contain everything. Within the symbol lies the lotus, timeless and pure, like an unshaken heart blooming amidst life's uncertainties. I often reflect on how the lotus thrives in mud and muck, untouched by its murkiness. I see in this fact the promise that we too can rise above the struggles of attachment if we learn to open ourselves to the moment. *"The hands release, the burden falls, / What once was grasped now freely calls."*

I also wanted the background to convey meaning. Symbolizing the struggle of clinging and the weight it places on the mind, are the tangled roots, which represent our fears, our desires, and the incessant craving for permanence in an impermanent world. We all wish for permanence, but we all too often experience the pain of impermanence when we realize how inevitable it is.

The roots mean something too; they give way to an open, boundless field bathed in light. This transition mirrors the journey described in the verse: *"A life unburdened flows like a stream, / No need to capture, no fixed dream."* To me, this shift represents the very heart of the path—to move from entanglement to openness, from clinging to release.

One detail that feels especially poignant to me is the delicate dew evaporating into sunlight. Morning dew in the light of the bright rising sun sparkles like millions of diamonds. But each little diamond droplet is fleeting, its beauty inseparable from its impermanence; a profound reminder of the poem's verse: *"To clutch the dew is to hold despair, / But to marvel, unbound, brings joy to the air."* I wanted this moment in the image to feel tender, almost fragile, because it reflects the tender nature of life itself. It's not actually denying the impermanence but marveling at it—finding joy in what arises and passes, without the need to grasp by forming a memory or taking a picture.

I thought a lot about the air, the breeze and the sense of openness that comes with letting go. I wanted the reader to experience something like an invitation, a calling to the seeker to step lightly, walk into the world with a heart unencumbered by the weight of clinging. *"Oh seeker, step light, the world is vast, / What is not clung to is never past."* This is the message I wanted to convey: that letting go isn't just about loss but an opening, a way of living fully without the need to hold onto what was never truly ours in the first place.

This image is, for me, is a quiet celebration of freedom—not the kind of illusory freedom that comes with acquisition or control, but the kind that arises when we finally release the delusion of control. "*In letting go, no less remains, / But a quiet joy where no self reigns."* That joy, that lightness, is what I hope this image, like the poem, offers to the viewer. It's a reminder that the weightless way is not somewhere out there—it's right here, within you, and it is there in the act of letting go, in the choice to release, and in the beauty of simply being rather than having.

2024 – Dīpabhasadhamma

A Heart Unbound

The self, in its tower, sits alone,
Building walls from “mine,” from “my own.”
It hoards its wealth, its fleeting gains,
Blind to the world beyond its chains.

It scrolls through mirrors on glowing screens,
Seeking echoes of its curated dreams.
"Am I enough? Do they see me?"
A cry for worth in a digital sea.

The world narrows as the self expands,
Clutching tightly to shrinking hands.
"I am the center, I am the whole,"
Yet selfishness hollows the very goal.

Neighbors unseen, strangers ignored,
A world divided, its love untoward.
In the market, in traffic, in fleeting hellos,
The self stands guarded, its fear only grows.

The Buddha spoke of a different view,
Of the heart that widens, of compassion true.
"When the self dissolves, the veil is thin,
You see yourself in every kin."

A parent's grief, a stranger's cry,
The wounded earth beneath the sky—
All are threads of the same vast weave,
All are lives that joy and grieve.

To see this truth, let the armor fall,
No need for conquest, no need for walls.
Step from the shadows of "me" and "mine,"
To the boundless light of the intertwine.

Imagine the world as a single hand,
Each finger a life, yet part of the span.
Hurt one finger, the hand feels the sting,
Heal one, and all begin to sing.

Oh seeker, pause, and look around:
The selfish path leaves barren ground.
Where greed takes root, no flower grows,
But in giving freely, compassion flows.

Help the stranger who walks your street,
Speak with kindness to those you meet.
See the worker, the beggar, the child who weeps—
Their dreams are yours, their hope yours to keep.

The modern plight of "I, I, I,"
Builds towers tall, but the heart runs dry.
What wealth can soothe, what fame can fill,
A mind locked tight in its iron will?

Break the cage, unlock the door,
Step outside, and seek no more.
For joy arises when self is none,
When all are seen as threads of one.

A river flows watering the sea,
The lotus, no drop does it claims, "This is for me."
The tree gives fruit, its shade, its air,
Unbound, unselfish, beyond compare.

Let the self fall silent, and the world begins,
In the heart unburdened, compassion wins.
To live for others is not to lose,
But to find a life the self could not choose.

Oh seeker, reflect, and take the stand:
Extend your heart, unclench your hand.
For in no-self lies a boundless grace,
A compassion vast as time and space.

This is the way, the path so clear:
To see all beings as sacred, near.
The self dissolves, the heart expands,
And love embraces all the lands.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "The Heart Unbound"

"A Heart Unbound." The image resonates deeply with the pulse of this poem, delivering its truths not just through words but through the visual language of symbol and metaphor. From the deep meaning I've taken away from this poem I feel my commentary must peel back the layers of its significance, connecting it explicitly to the poem's themes of self-centeredness, interconnection, and liberation from the chains of ego.

At the center of the image is a monk—a representation of both the individual seeker and the embodiment of potential transcendence. Surrounding this figure, the great wheel dominates, a symbol of samsara, the unrelenting cycle of birth, suffering, and rebirth perpetuated by attachment and delusion. Yet, unlike a pristine Dhammacakka (the Wheel of the Dhamma), this wheel is weighed down, adorned with chains that bind the individuals in its orbit. This imagery speaks directly to the poem's opening lines: *"The self, in its tower, sits alone, / Building walls from 'mine,' from 'my own.'"* The wheel does not turn freely—it is shackled by the constructs of the ego, much like the "tower" of the self-described in the poem.

The chains, tethering figures as they march in a grim procession, are an unmistakable reflection of *"The modern plight of 'I, I, I,' / Builds towers tall, but the heart runs dry."* The figures appear to be burdened by material possessions—a car, a phone, even a towering Ferris wheel of distractions. Truly artifacts of modern life that represent the "glowing screens" and "curated dreams" through which people seek validation and meaning, blind to the suffering of others. This imagery is poignant: each individual clutches their chains, absorbed in their own orbit, yet bound together in something I can only call a shared delusion.

And yet, I think that Dīpa wants to point us to hope here. The lotus at the monk's feet is no mere decorative flourish; it's the beacon of possibility, the same lotus invoked in the poem's imagery: *"A river flows watering the sea, / The lotus, no drop does it claim, 'This is for me.'"* The lotus, although it thrives in muddy waters, liberation can arise from the conditions of murky suffering. It stands in stark contrast to the cracked, barren ground surrounding the wheel—a vivid manifestation of the poem's warning: *"The selfish path leaves barren ground. / Where greed takes root, no flower grows."* In this image, Dīpa says that the lotus symbolizes the unbound heart, which grows not by hoarding but by giving freely, by releasing attachment to "me" and "mine."

The figures tethered to the wheel appear unaware of their interconnectedness, yet they march together in different directions, yet their fates are intertwined. This echoes the poem's call to see the world as *"a single hand, / Each finger a life, yet part of the span."* I believe that this image also challenges the viewer to consider: What chains bind me? What possessions or identities have I clung to, mistaking them for freedom while they weigh me down?

Equally telling is the backdrop. A pagoda and a Ferris wheel seem juxtaposed, almost mocking the sacred with the profane. A pagoda, usually a symbol of spiritual aspiration, stands isolated, its wisdom overlooked by those caught in the carnival of electronic and mechanical distractions. Stretching across the landscape to the horizon, is the stark reminder of the consequences of selfishness: *"Help the stranger who walks your street, / Speak with kindness to those you meet."* The world depicted here suffers not from scarcity of resources but from scarcity of compassion.

A monk at the center, who stands with palms joined in meditation, is the anchor of this visual narrative. Unlike the figures chained to the wheel, the monk is free, aligned with the teachings of the Buddha that dissolve the boundaries of self. This aligns with the poem's concluding verses: *"Let the self fall silent, and the world begins, / In the heart unburdened, compassion wins."* I imagine that the monk invites the viewer to pause, to reflect, and to recognize that liberation lies not in escape but in embracing the world as it is, with all its interconnected threads.

I admire the boldness of this image for its unflinching critique of modern life and its call to action. The image does not sugarcoat the human condition; it lays bare the folly of our attachments while holding space for transformation. As the poem and image together suggest, the path to freedom is not paved with possessions or achievements but with the courage to let go of them, to love, to experience directly, and to see oneself in the other.

~ **2024 – Panna Foundation Publishing – H.C.**

The Unbound Path

The heart pounds, a restless cry,
Chained to a question: "Why must I?"
The self weaves tales, defends its ground,
But truth erupts—a silent sound.

Awake! The Buddha's voice cuts clear,
"This is the path, no need to fear.
What binds you tight is grasping flame,
Release the self, and end the game."

Look deeply, now, at what you hold—
Each thought, each fear, each claim so bold.
The "I" you guard, the "mine" you defend,
A mirage that fades as the journey bends.

What permanence dwells in form or name?
What essence stands in life's swift flame?
Impermanent, empty, this is the key—
To see, to know, to simply be free.

The wheel of life, it turns and grinds,
A ceaseless cycle of clinging minds.
Yet one step forward, beyond this haze,
And the endless turning begins to fade.

The fire of greed, the storm of fear,
Are born of the self you hold so near.
But cast them off, and the sky unfolds,
A vast expanse where freedom molds.

This is the moment, sharp and bright,
To cut through delusion with piercing sight.
Each breath you take, each fleeting thought,
Reveals the self as less than naught.

No waiting now, no future to see—
The path is here, in this clarity.
The Buddha's words, alive and true:
"Not-self is the way through and through."

Feel the rush, the sudden release,
A heart unbound, a mind at peace.
The weight of "I" falls to the ground,
And in its place, no bounds are found.

A step is taken, then another,
Each moment lighter than the other.
The world unfolds, unmarked, unclaimed,
A radiant freedom, untamed, unnamed.

Oh seeker, rise, this is the time!
No more delay, no steep incline.
The truth ignites, the way is clear,
Beyond the self, no cause for fear.

The path to liberation is the flame
That burns the root, the self's false name.
In its ashes, the boundless appears,
No self remains, no clinging, no tears.

This is the fulcrum, the pivot, the core,
The moment the seeker needs nothing more.
Awaken now—this truth sustains:
The path to freedom is all that remains.

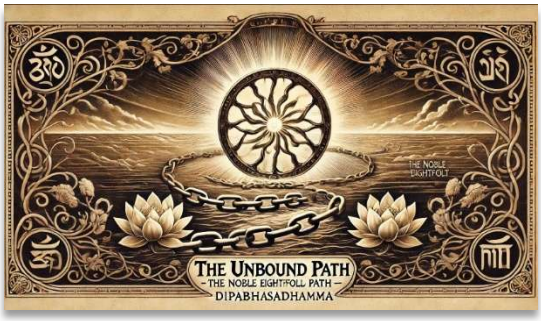

Image Symbolism of the Poem "The Unbound Path"

In this image for the poem "The Unbound Path," Dīpabhasadhamma intricately weaves the poem's themes of liberation, impermanence, and awakening into its visual elements. At the heart of the image stands a solitary monk, poised at the edge of a dissolving path. This path, transitioning from defined terrain into a radiant, boundless expanse of open sky, represents the journey of releasing attachment and embracing clarity. It embodies the lines: "*The path is here, in this clarity… A step is taken, then another, / Each moment lighter than the other.*" The monk symbolizes the seeker, who, through the teachings of the Buddha, walks the path of liberation beyond the illusions of self.

At the monk's feet lie broken chains, a potent symbol of release from the bonds of greed, fear, and clinging. These chains echo the verse: "*What binds you tight is grasping flame, / Release the self, and end the game.*" Their shattered state signifies the freedom achieved when the seeker realizes the impermanent and empty nature of attachment. This breaking of bonds aligns with the realization that "The fire of greed, the storm of fear, / Are born of the self you hold so near."

The background transitions from shadows and swirling storms to a radiant, open sky, symbolizing the impermanence of struggle and the expansive freedom that emerges when the self dissolves. The poem captures this transformation with: "*The wheel of life, it turns and grinds, / A ceaseless cycle of clinging minds. / Yet one step*

forward, beyond this haze, / And the endless turning begins to fade." The fading storms represent the ending of this ceaseless cycle, while the open sky embodies the vastness of liberation.

Above the scene, the symbol for the Ten Perfections (**Dasa Parami**) shines in the sky, radiating a guiding light. This symbol connects directly to the Buddha's teachings, which serve as the foundation of the seeker's journey. The wheel signifies the ten perfections that one can attain by practicing the Eightfold Path:

1. **Dāna** (Generosity): The practice of giving, sharing, and letting go. It is the first perfection because it softens the heart, reduces attachment, and fosters compassion.
    - Example: Offering food, resources, or knowledge selflessly.
2. **Sīla** (Morality): Adherence to ethical conduct and the precepts, which creates harmony and peace.
    - Example: Abstaining from harming others, speaking truthfully, and living ethically.
3. **Nekkhamma** (Renunciation): The voluntary letting go of worldly attachments, desires, and comforts to cultivate inner freedom.
    - Example: Choosing a life of simplicity or dedicating oneself to meditation and spiritual growth.
4. **Paññā** (Wisdom): The development of insight into the true nature of reality, understanding impermanence (anicca), suffering (dukkha), and non-self (anattā).
    - Example: Practicing vipassanā meditation to deepen understanding of the nature of existence.
5. **Viriya** (Energy or Effort): Persistent effort and diligence in practicing the Dhamma, overcoming obstacles, and achieving wholesome goals.
    - Example: Persevering in meditation practice despite challenges.
6. Khanti (Patience): The ability to endure difficulties, harm, or suffering with a calm and forgiving heart.
    - Example: Responding to hostility or hardship with equanimity and understanding.
7. **Sacca** (Truthfulness): The commitment to truth in thought, speech, and action.
    - Example: Speaking honestly and living authentically in alignment with the Dhamma.
8. **Adhiṭṭhāna** (Determination): Resolute commitment and unshakable will to achieve one's spiritual goals.
    - Example: Setting and maintaining strong intentions to uphold virtue and continue the path.
9. **Mettā** (Loving-kindness): The cultivation of unconditional love and goodwill toward all beings.
    - Example: Practicing mettā meditation, wishing others happiness and freedom from suffering.
10. **Upekkhā** (Equanimity): Balanced detachment and even-mindedness in the face of life's ups and downs.
    - Example: Maintaining inner peace regardless of praise or blame, gain or loss.

This is expressed in the poem: "*The Buddha's words, alive and true: / 'Not-self is the way through and through.'*" Its presence reinforces the teachings that help the seeker break free from the illusions of permanence and selfhood.

The dissolving path, the broken chains, and the radiant sky collectively reflect the poem's central message: "*Feel the rush, the sudden release, / A heart unbound, a mind at peace. / The weight of 'I' falls to the ground, / And in its place, no bounds are found.*" These visual elements converge to illustrate the transformative power of letting go, inviting the viewer to embrace the profound freedom described in the poem.

Ultimately, this image captures the essence of "The Unbound Path"—the journey from attachment and suffering to liberation and boundlessness.

The image draws you into it, and onto the path before you. The imagery is not a manifestation of any actual celestial destination, shrouded in doctrinal mysteries created by the imaginations of human beings representing the abode of celestial beings. Rather, the image is the product of human imagination representing the power of what lies ahead for someone who sets out to practice the Path.

Every detail, from the monk's stance to the expansive sky, serves as a visual counterpart to the poem's invitation: "*Oh seeker, rise, this is the time! / No more delay, no steep incline. / The truth ignites, the way is clear, / Beyond the self, no cause for fear.*" It is a call to awaken, to let go, and to step into the vast, unclaimed freedom of no-self.

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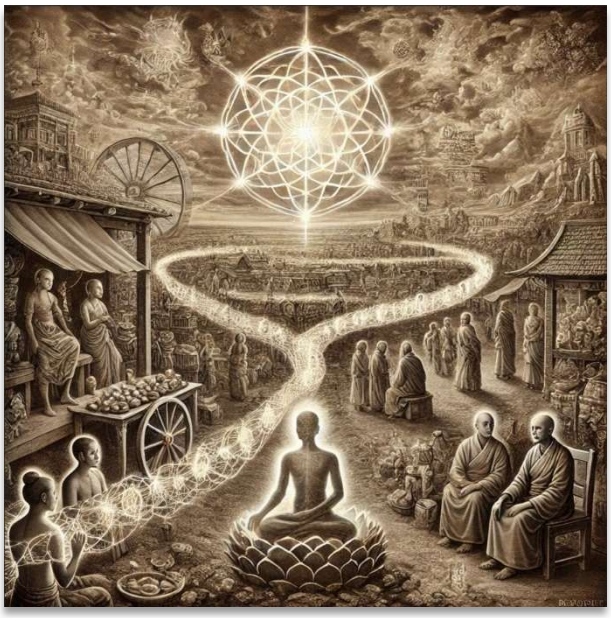
Anatta: The Thread of Reality



In the rush of morning, the world takes form,
Faces pass by, a familiar swarm.
"Who am I?" whispers the self again,
Lost in the tide of joy and pain.
A mirror reflects, but does it reveal?
A fleeting image, nothing to seal.
Each thought, each role, each fleeting guise,
Dissolves when the seeker opens their eyes.

The Buddha spoke of this unseen thread,
Binding all lives, though no self is wed.
In every breath, in each exchange,
Anattā whispers: "Nothing is strange."

The fear that grips, the greed that grows,
Spring from the self that thinks it knows.
But what if the self were seen as air,
A fleeting ripple, a shadow fair?

In the market's din, in the quiet of home,
In fields of work, wherever you roam—
No "I" commands, no "mine" defends,
The self dissolves, the conflict ends.

Help flows freely, a gentle tide,
No self to shield, no need to hide.
A stranger's smile, a word of grace,
An open heart in every space.

The joy of release, the weight unbound,
In daily life, such peace is found.
No need to clutch, no walls to build,
The heart finds calm, the mind is stilled.

When loss arrives, as loss will do,
No self laments, no anguish brews.
For what is lost was never "I,"
Just passing clouds in an open sky.

To live this way is to truly see
That freedom lies in what cannot be.
No self to own, no self to claim,
No need for fear, no need for blame.

Oh seeker, in every act, begin
To see the self not as within,
But as a thread that moves and blends,
A fleeting part of all that mends.

This is the teaching, the truth profound:
To walk in life where none are bound.
In every step, in every glance,
Anattā offers a second chance.

No self to hinder, no self to divide,
A vast horizon, the world as wide.
The teaching echoes, the wisdom stays—
Anattā lives in our everyday ways.

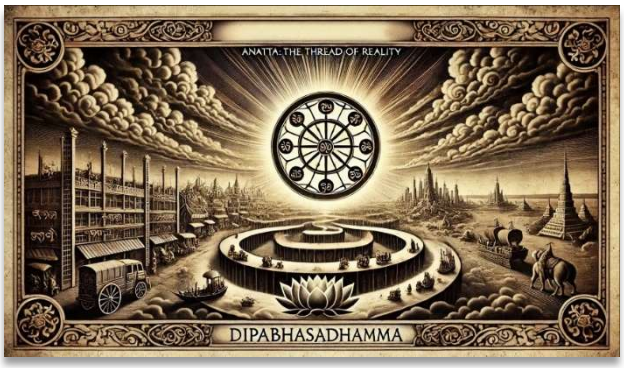


Image Symbolism of the Poem "Anatta: The Thread of Reality"

In the opening verse of this poem, I cannot help but see myself, rushing in the morning, not really paying much attention to anything in particular, just going through the motions of beginning my day. But, the image for "Anatta—The Thread of Reality" is a masterpiece of layered nuance and subtlety, evoking a visceral response to the profound truths encapsulated in the poem. Allow me, if I may, to peel back the layers of this visual marvel and its connection to the verses. This is not merely an illustration but a dialogue between the art, the words, and the viewer's sense of self—or, rather, the lack of it.

The focal point of the image is, of course, the radiant geometric orb representing the Eightfold Path suspended in the sky, a symbol of the interconnectedness the poem so eloquently speaks of. This orb, a dazzling nexus of light and symmetry, seems to hum with the energy of the universe, whispering the truth of anatta: no self stands alone, and every being is but a node in the cosmic web. How apt that this central light illuminates the path winding through the lives depicted below—market vendors, monks, laypeople, all captured in moments of ordinary existence. Each figure seems tethered to this thread of light, which flows like an unbroken river through the heart of the image. Here, the poem's line, *"Anattā whispers: 'Nothing is strange,'"* comes alive with visual immediacy. The light connects everyone without judgment, hierarchy, or distinction, dissolving the illusion of separation.

What I find particularly striking is the juxtaposition of the worldly and the transcendent. On one side, we have the bustling marketplace—a cacophony of trade, chatter, and attachment. On the other side, a serene group of monks sits in contemplative observation, embodying the detachment the poem calls for. Yet, rather than existing in opposition, these realms are intertwined by the thread of light. This, I think, reflects the poem's assertion that anatta is not an esoteric abstraction but a living, breathing truth found in *"daily life, such peace is found."*

The seated figure at the bottom, glowing atop a lotus, is undeniably the anchor of the scene. Here is the seeker, perhaps even Dīpa's idealized self or an archetype of all who strive to embody the wisdom of the Buddha. The choice of the lotus—rooted in mud yet blooming in purity—reinforces the poem's call to transcend the murky waters of *"fear that grips, the greed that grows."* What moves me, however, is not just the imagery of transcendence but the figure's tether to the thread of light. This is no lone ascetic; this is an individual whose liberation is intricately linked to the liberation of others. It's as if the image whispers, "To seek freedom is to unshackle the world."

And then there is the cityscape in the background, sprawling and complex, a reminder that even as we meditate, the machinery of samsara grinds on. The wheel in the corner—rustic yet eternal—echoes the cyclic nature of existence the poem so beautifully dismantles. Yet, in the presence of the radiant thread, even this wheel appears less menacing, as if the teachings of the Buddha have begun to loosen its hold.

In creating this image, Dīpabhasadhamma has rendered an existential truth that even skeptics like myself cannot help but admire. The visual narrative does not demand belief; it invites inquiry. It challenges us to see ourselves not as isolated entities hoarding our petty desires but as part of a vast, luminous interplay of causes and conditions. As the poem asserts, *"No self to own, no self to claim, / No need for fear, no need for blame,"* the image mirrors this liberation with grace and urgency. It is not a plea but a proclamation: the self is an illusion, and the world—this radiant, interconnected tapestry—is infinitely more beautiful without it.

This image, like the poem, leaves me humbled and, dare I say, inspired. It is both a mirror and a map, reflecting the threads of my own reality while pointing to a horizon far beyond it.

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POEMS ABOUT
KAMMA

Poems About Kamma

Following is a series of poems I wrote that reflect on the Buddha's teachings of kamma, the law of cause and effect that underpins the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth and which is the center of the truth about the nature of reality. In his teachings, the Buddha illuminated the profound implications of kamma, emphasizing that our actions—of body, speech, and mind—shape our present experiences and future trajectories. Far from being deterministic, the Buddha's explanation of kamma reveals the empowering truth that we have the ability to influence our own path in life by cultivating wholesome intentions and letting go of harmful habits.

Kamma is not a mechanism of reward and punishment, as is commonly believed, but a reflection of how our actions ripple through existence, affecting not only ourselves but also those around us. Each thought, word, and deed we generate carries a weight, a potential to bind us further in cycles of suffering or to liberate us through skillful and mindful choices. As the Buddha taught, it is our intentions that determine the ethical quality of our actions, making mindfulness and wisdom essential tools for shaping a brighter, freer future.

Understanding kamma offers a lens through which we can view the interconnectedness of life and the responsibility we hold in shaping our reality. The Buddha's teachings on kamma encourage us to reflect on the power of volition, to observe how our choices lead to outcomes, and to take accountability for our actions. They remind us that we are both inheritors of past actions and creators of new pathways, capable of transforming ignorance and craving into clarity and compassion.

These poems delve into the multifaceted nature of kamma, exploring its influence on the cycles of samsara (birth, suffering and death) and its role as a vehicle for awakening the mind. They guide the reader to contemplate how intentional actions shape the world within and without, offering a deeper understanding of the Buddha's teachings. With each poem, I invite you to pause, reflect, and recognize the significance of every choice we make, inspiring us to live with greater mindfulness, purpose, and care. -**Dīpa**

The Thread of Action

Beneath the loom of time unseen,
A thread is spun, both soft and keen.
Each moment's choice, each deed we weave,
A pattern forms, though few perceive.

With hands of thought, the spindle turns,
As fire of will within us burns.
In silent fields, seeds gently fall,
To sprout as fruits that answer all.

A whispered word, a fleeting deed,
A motion slight—a karmic seed.
Unseen, the thread runs taut and true,
Binding past and what's to ensue.

Yet threads can fray and knots unwind,
If wisdom's light can clear the mind.
A gentler weave, a mindful stitch,
Can free the heart, both poor and rich.

The thread of action, vast yet small,
Connects us each, connects us all.
In every act, a future grows—
The weave of life, its ebb and flows.

So, pause and see the thread you spin,
For what begins must once begin.
With care, with love, let actions be—
A tapestry of harmony.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "The Thread of Action."

What I have before me at this moment is not merely an illustration but truly a visual tapestry, a layered exploration of causality, intention, and the indelible marks of human agency.

At the center of this intricate design lies the wheel of the Eightfold Path—its axis a dazzling convergence of lines and patterns, echoing the verse: *"Each gesture—an echo stitched into air, / Each thought—a spark marking the unseen."* This wheel, with its radiating spokes, symbolizes, not merely the interconnectedness of actions, the ripple effects that extend far beyond the immediacy of their origin, but the profound elements of the Buddha's teaching from the Four Noble Truths. It is not a wheel of fortune, blind and arbitrary, but a wheel of intention, deliberate and ceaselessly turning.

Upon noting the figures around the wheel, at first, I thought they might be just some artistic placeholders, but then I realized that what Dīpabhasadhamma is wanting us to see is that each figure is absorbed in their own pursuits—building, weaving, contemplating. These are not idle depictions; they are embodiments of human volition, each character a thread in the vast loom of existence. They call to mind the lines: *"We are nothing but the actions we choose, / Their weight*

woven into the fabric of stars." Here, the image challenges us to confront the reality that our lives are not isolated but intricately interwoven with the lives of others, across time and space.

Above, we see celestial elements—planets, constellations, and cosmic currents—reminding us that our actions, though seemingly insignificant, are part of a greater cosmic order. This speaks directly to the poem's evocation of vastness: *"This morning, the sky unraveled itself, / A soft canvas of becoming."* I asked Dīpa if he had written this poem in the morning, and he had. The juxtaposition of the earthly and the celestial in the image mirrors the duality of our existence—rooted in the mundane yet connected to the infinite.

The lower part of the image draws us closer to the earth. Figures labor, sow, and reap, emphasizing the cyclical nature of cause and effect. The child playing in the foreground is a poignant detail, a reminder of the inheritance of our deeds. It aligns with the verse: *"Each step casting ripples into the universe."* The image compels us to reflect on the legacy of our actions, the threads we leave for future generations to unravel or continue.

Then there are the figures at the top, their arms outstretched and engaged, pulling and weaving the threads of the wheel. These hands are not bound by their tasks; they are purposeful, intentional. They reflect the line: *"What hand, steady or trembling, / Can draw a line without consequence?"* The hands remind us of our power, our responsibility, and the weight of our choices.

Finally, the overall composition of the image—its layers and movement—evokes the dynamic interplay of permanence and impermanence, a theme central to the poem: *"Even then, the threads remain— / Not as chains, but as a memory."* The threads we weave endure, not as burdens but as reminders of what has been and what could be.

This image does not let us rest comfortably. It demands that we confront the reality of our actions, their weight, and their echoes. It challenges us to step into the role of the weaver, to shape the threads with intention and care. In its profound intricacy, the image for **"The Thread of Action"** becomes a mirror—reflecting not only the poem's insights but also the viewer's capacity to shape, and be shaped by, the threads of existence.

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Stream of Action

Beneath the stillness of the surface,
the stream remembers.
Ripples, soft as whispers,
stretch across its skin,
carrying the weight of what once was,
and the promise of what will be.

Each stone, each leaf, each falling star,
disturbs the water's fragile hold,
sending echoes downstream,
to touch unseen shores.
Nothing vanishes. Nothing rests.
The stream carries all,
its memory vast as sky.

And so, we walk,
casting stones of thought,
of word, of deed.

Each act circles outward,
beyond the edges of our sight,
marking the lives we meet,
and the lives yet to come.

The past flows forward,
weaving with the present,
shaping the future
like roots hidden beneath the soil,
twisting and guiding
the course of every stream.

Do we not hear it,
the faint hum of actions long forgotten?
A kindness, a cruelty,
a moment of silence that spoke too much.

The stream holds them all,
turning them into echoes,
into waves that bind us to ourselves,
to each other,
to the endless dance of water and time.

Yet even in its flow,
the stream is free.
It teaches us:
Change is the only constant.
What was, bends into what is.
What is, folds into what may be.

Stand at the bank,
and cast your stone with care.
Watch as the ripples form,
then vanish into the horizon.
For though they fade,
their echoes remain,
woven into the stream's quiet song.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Stream of Action"

The image for Dīpabhasadhamma's *"Stream of Action"* is nothing short of a visual meditation, an intricate portrayal of the poem's exploration of the fluidity of existence and the inevitable ripples cast by our every thought, word, and deed. This is, as I see it, a reflection on the nature of interconnectedness—a theme that runs as deep and inexorable as the river itself, winding through the landscape of life.

At the heart of this piece is the swirling vortex at the center of the stream, drawing the viewer's eye inward, as though inviting us to step into the still point where all motion begins. It brings to mind the poem's opening lines: "*Beneath the stillness of the surface, / The stream remembers."* This vortex is not just a whirlpool of water—it is the embodiment of the karmic forces that underlie existence, gathering the past and shaping the future, ever turning and never ceasing.

The solitary figure standing at the stream's edge, poised to cast a stone, is a masterful representation of the verse: *"We Walk, casting stones of thought, / Of word, of deed."* Here, Dīpabhasadhamma has given us a contemplative moment of pause—a moment to reflect on the weight of our actions before we release them into the current. The stone, small yet significant, holds the potential to transform the flow, sending ripples outward in ways unseen and unpredictable.

The surrounding landscape, with its ancient trees and far-reaching roots, echoes the poem's acknowledgment of continuity: "*The past flows forward, weaving with the present, / Shaping the future like roots hidden beneath the soil."* The roots twist and wind their way into the stream, suggesting that nothing exists in isolation. Each element—earth, water, sky—is a participant in this grand interplay, where the seen and unseen are inextricably linked.

Above, the swirling cosmos mirrors the whirlpool below, a visual affirmation of the lines: *"Nothing vanishes. Nothing rests. / The stream carries all, its memory vast as sky."* The connection between the earthly stream and the celestial spiral reminds us of the vastness of existence and the universality of the truths the Buddha illuminated. The currents of kamma do not merely affect the individual—they resonate across dimensions, weaving through the fabric of the cosmos itself.

And now, we arrive at an interesting literary choice: this is the first poem written by Dīpabhasadhamma that does not rhyme. Why might this be? Perhaps it is because rhyme has a way of enclosing thought, of tidying up loose ends into neat and symmetrical patterns. But life, as this image so eloquently reminds us, is anything but tidy. The stream of action flows without the constraints of human conventions—it meanders, swirls, deepens, and branches off in ways that defy predictability. By forgoing rhyme, Dīpabhasadhamma has allowed the poem to reflect the fluid, unstructured nature of the stream itself.

"Stand still and watch— / Do you not see? / The stream was never yours or me." These closing lines reverberate through the image, a gentle reminder that our actions, though personal, are never truly private. The stream carries them, shapes them, and returns them to the world in ways we may never know. It is an invitation to marvel at the vast, interconnected dance of existence and to walk through life with mindfulness, casting stones not recklessly, but with care.

In the end, this image, like the poem it accompanies, is a gift—a moment to pause, to see, and to reflect on the extraordinary currents that shape our lives. It is an invitation to step lightly, with the understanding that every ripple we create flows onward, forever part of the great stream of action.

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Echoes in the Stream

Beneath the stream, the ripples flow,
A quiet tale of all we know.
Each stone we cast, each gentle tear,
Expands beyond what we hold near.

A whisper brushed the water's face,
It drifted on with quiet grace.
Yet far downstream, the whisper grew,
Its weight unknown, its path untrue.

For every word, and deed, and thought,
Gives shape to ripples time has wrought.
No act is small, no touch erased,
The stream recalls what time has traced.

What love we gave, what harm we spread,
What fears we stoked, what hope we fed,
Each echo blends, a soft refrain,
Returning not as loss, but gain.

And as the water twists and turns,
Its glassy surface bends and burns.
The sun reflects, the moon replies,
Each ripple lives beneath the skies.

But what of us, who cast the stone,
And think the ripples ours alone?
The stream would laugh, if streams could speak,
For echoes climb and valleys seek.

Know this: the stream is not your own,
Its waters carve through flesh and bone.
The waves you make will find their shore—
And circle back forevermore.

Stand still and watch—
Do you not see?
The stream was never yours or me.
Its endless flow, its ceaseless spin,
Is but the world reflecting within.
So cast with care, for what you send,
Will meet you gently at the end.

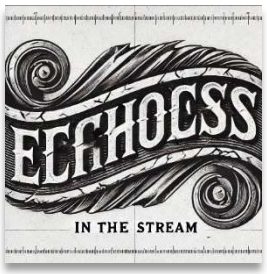

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Echoes in the Stream"

The image accompanying the poem *"Echoes in the Stream"* invites an examination that resonates with a philosophy of logic and metaphysical curiosity. As I consider the intricate details of this image, I am compelled to approach it as a philosopher might—dissecting its symbolic elements, not merely as art, but as a profound representation of causality and the inexorable link between action and consequence.

At the forefront of this composition is the whirlpool, a spiraling nexus within the stream. To me, it symbolizes the inevitability of consequence, akin to the logical necessity that follows a premise. The poem states, *"A pebble dropped in a quiet stream, / Ripples outward, touching the unseen,"* and this visual vortex mirrors that notion. It is not merely an aesthetic detail; it is a precise representation of the perpetuity of influence—a concept deeply rooted in both physics and ethical philosophy. The whirlpool draws everything into its center, much like how every action, regardless of intent, gathers repercussions.

The figure poised at the bank, stone in hand, offers me a moment of reflection. This is a representation of agency—an individual contemplating their act before committing it to the currents of existence. The scene corresponds aptly to the poem's lines: *"What love we gave, what harm we spread, / What fears we stoked, what hope we fed."* Here, I am reminded that human agency is not exempt from responsibility. Like the stone cast into the stream, every act alters the course of reality in ways that may not be immediately perceptible but are nonetheless inevitable.

The stream itself, winding through a landscape that merges the earthly with the cosmic, I think, embodies continuity. Its waters traverse a terrain filled with gnarled roots—signifying entanglement, the connections and complexities of human interactions. The roots, some visible and others buried beneath the soil, echo the stanza: *"The past flows forward, weaving with the present, / Shaping the future like roots hidden beneath the soil."* This interplay of visibility and obscurity reminds me that while some consequences of our actions are apparent, others unfold invisibly, embedded within the fabric of existence.

Overhead, the celestial spiral mirrors the terrestrial vortex, a harmonious parallel between the microcosm and the macrocosm. The stars, swirling in patterns akin to the whirlpool below, evoke the infinite. This duality between the earthly and the cosmic aligns with the poem's reflection on interconnectedness: *"The stream holds them all, turning them into echoes, / Into waves that bind us to ourselves, to each other."* In this image, I see not just the actions of an individual but the broader schema of cause and effect, as intricate and endless as the cosmos itself.

The choice of medium—black and white—I believe further emphasizes the stark interplay of light and shadow, of action and consequence. There is no ambiguity here, no middle ground. Every ripple is a declaration, much as every human decision leaves its indelible mark. This simplicity, far from being reductive, sharpens the focus on the profound truths the image seeks to convey.

Ultimately, *"Echoes in the Stream"*—both the poem and its visual counterpart—compels me to consider the ethical dimensions of human actions. In its sweeping curves and spirals, the image invites a contemplation of the broader consequences of our human deeds, challenging the viewer to act not only with mindfulness but with an awareness of the unseen ripples we humans create. It is, in essence, a call to live, not merely by philosophy, but determination to recognize that each act is a thread woven into the infinite tapestry of existence.

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The Forge of Intentions

Deep in the quiet chambers of the mind,
Where shadows linger and sparks unwind,
A forge burns bright, unseen, untamed,
Shaping the thoughts we've left unnamed.

Here lies the wheel of intent,
Turning with force, deliberate, spent.
Each thought a hammer, each choice a flame,
Each deed a thread in the karmic frame.

"Intention," the Buddha taught, "is the seed,
From which arises every deed.
Wholesome volition brings peace and light,
But craving sows the fruits of plight."

What fuels this fire, desire, despair?
Each act a mirror of what's laid bare.
With wrong intent, the heart distorts,
Binding itself to sorrow's courts.

Harmful deeds, born of greed or spite,
Will ripple through lifetimes, veiling the light.
Yet acts of kindness, rooted in care,
Unbind the chains of suffering's snare.

We build with hands both swift and still,
Imprints of action through our thought and will.
In every moment, a seed takes root,
To blossom in time, with joy or brute.

The forge is tireless, its work proceeds,
Born of craving, yet shaped by needs.
But wisdom's flame can redirect,
And cleanse the mind of harm's effect.

Look inward, seeker, where the fire burns,
Where volition molds and the wheel turns.
Shape it with care, for in every refrain,
The choices you forge will come again.

So, pause, reflect, before you act,
On the path your intention will enact.
For what you will, you surely weave—
And in its fruits, you'll soon believe.

Look inward, seeker, where this fire ignites,
Where volition molds both days and nights.
Shape it with care, with mindfulness' refrain,
For what you forge, you'll meet again.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "The Forge of Intentions"

It has been said before, but it is worth repeating, Dīpabhasadhamma's images are like visual meditations. The image for the poem **"The Forge of Intentions,"** is a profound meditation on the ceaseless activity of the human mind, that great forge where reality is shaped and reshaped. At the center of this intricate depiction is a radiant spiral, a whirling wheel of creation, symbolizing the cyclical nature of intention. Each strand flowing outward represents the boundless possibilities of thought, action, and consequence. This is the forge, our own intentions, they are the crucible of becoming, where the interplay of volition, desire, and action crafts the very essence of our existence.

Notice the hands on either side of the wheel. One reaches out to place a thread, while the other pulls one away, a subtle nod to the duality of choice—construction and deconstruction, creation and destruction. This reflects the poem's lines, *"Each thought a hammer, each choice a flame, / Each deed a mark that none can tame."* Here, the hands represent our agency, the perpetual activity of shaping the path we ourselves make through our intentions.

Now look closer at the flames below—subtle, yet fierce. They symbolize the driving force of volition, the energy of desire and craving that feeds the forge, echoing the poem's inquiry, *"What ignites this fire—desire, despair?"* But there's a paradox here, isn't there? While the fire is fed by ignorance, it can also be tempered by wisdom, reshaping our intentions into something liberating rather than binding.

Above and around the wheel, the cosmos expands, reminding us of the universal implications of our smallest actions. The interconnected loops mirror the poem's truth: *"In each decision, a thread is spun, / Binding the many, making the one."* The spiraling design, vast yet precise, is a cosmic dance—every action, every choice rippling outward, shaping not only our individual paths but the collective reality.

And at the edges, the subtle yet deliberate inclusion of additional wheels and instruments of craft hints at the endless nature of this process. We are always forging, always shaping, always transforming. Yet the image holds a whisper of hope—through mindfulness, through insight, the chains we forge can also be unbound, as the poem says: *"That chains are forged, but can be unbound."*

This image, like the poem, invites us to see the forge not as a prison but as an opportunity, a place of power where we can learn to shape our lives with intention, care, and wisdom. It beckons us to look inward, to tend the fire with love and understanding, and to craft a reality that aligns with the harmony of the cosmos itself.

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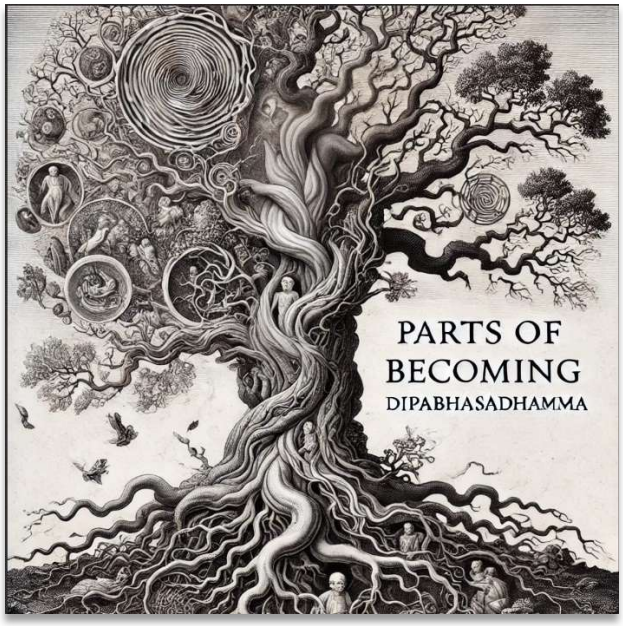
Parts of Becoming



Within the depths of thought's design,
Lie patterns etched, both yours and mine.
The mind, a field where seeds are sown,
Habits arise, and roots are grown.

Each moment shaped by what has been,
A shadow cast, a trace within.
The echo of choices, the weight of deeds,
Weaves the self with tangled threads and reeds.

Desire whispers, craving calls,
Fear builds fortresses, reason stalls.
From these formations, paths unfold,
The stories we tell, the roles we hold.

Habit is the sculptor's hand,
Carving the lives on which we stand.
Repeated thoughts, repeated ways,
Form the framework of our days.

Yet beneath the shape, there lies a key—
A truth unbound, a chance to see:
That habits are not fixed or fated,
They're merely patterns that we've created.

Through insight sharp and wisdom's flame,
The mind can soften, shift, and tame.
With each intention, each mindful breath,
We reshape the course from birth to death.

Parts of becoming—fluid, vast,
Changing the present, unbinding the past.
A cycle, yes, but not a chain,
The mind a field where freedom reigns.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Parts of Becoming"

Throughout his various writings, Dīpabhasadhamma has touched on the subject of "becoming," particularly in connection with meditation practice. He asks the question what the purpose of meditation is if not to become. What are we becoming through meditation? In this image for the poem **"Parts of Becoming,"** speaks volumes, doesn't it? It's a living tapestry, rooted in the depths of existence and reaching toward infinite potential. The central figure of the tree, with its gnarled roots and sprawling branches, encapsulates the essence of becoming—how life unfolds, grows, and intertwines through the myriad forces of kamma and volition.

The **roots**, twisting and diving deep into the earth, symbolize the foundations of our being—our past actions, our ingrained tendencies, and the influences that ground us. This connects beautifully to the idea in the poem: *"What ignites this fire—desire, despair? / The echoes of lifetimes etched into air."* The roots remind us that every action, no matter how small, feeds into the life we build, shaping the soil from which we grow.

The **trunk**, strong yet flexible, represents the continuity of existence—the present moment that carries the weight of the past and the potential for the future. Embedded within it are figures, faces, and lives—a reminder that the self is not fixed but composed of countless influences and tendencies. This reflects the poem's focus on the shifting nature of becoming: *"Volition stirs, a restless stream, / Crafting the substance of life's dream."*

Now notice the **branches**, reaching out into a vast expanse. They are alive with intricate detail, spiraling paths, and circular motifs, each representing a choice, a path, a possibility. Some branches bear fruit, others twist and fade, illustrating the outcomes of actions—some nourishing, others barren. This resonates with the poem's exploration of how intention shapes existence: *"In each decision, a thread is spun, / Binding the many, making the one."*

The **circular motifs** scattered among the branches and roots symbolize the cyclical nature of kamma and samsara. Each spiral and loop seems to hold stories of lives lived and actions taken, reinforcing the idea that *"From ignorance born, by craving fed, / It weaves the path on which we tread."* These cycles remind us of the interconnectedness of all things, urging us to reflect on the patterns we perpetuate.

And then there's the interplay of **light and shadow**, evoking the dual potential of becoming—to bind us further in ignorance or to lead us toward liberation from suffering. The figures scattered throughout the tree seem to be both part of its structure and observers of its growth, representing the self-awareness necessary to understand and transform the process of becoming.

This image, like the poem, is a call to mindfulness. It invites us to see the parts of becoming not as separate or fixed, but as components of an ever-evolving whole. The tree is not just a symbol of life—it is a map of our journey, a reflection of our choices, and a reminder that we have the power to shape the path forward. It's a stunning meditation on the interconnectedness of all existence and the profound responsibility we hold in the process of becoming.

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Birth Beyond the Veil

From the veil of silence, a spark unfolds,
Through unseen doors, the mind remolds.
The threads of past, both bright and frayed,
Weave a tapestry the present obeyed.

In twilight's hush, where shadows meet,
The seeds of deeds take root discreet.
A whisper carried on `karmic streams,
Shapes the worlds within our dreams.

Who were we, before this breath?
A fleeting shadow, a life from death.
The echoes of laughter, the taste of tears,
Rekindled anew in the turning of years.

The veil is thin, though none can see,
The hand that writes our destiny.
Not fate, not chance, but actions tied,
To form the path on which we stride.

In the womb of time, the spark ignites,
A flicker of light in endless nights.
From past to present, the chain proceeds,
A life reborn by ancient seeds.

Yet the veil is not unkind or cruel,
It holds no grudge, it follows no rule.
Only the law of cause and effect,
Unfolds the life that we elect.

Beyond the veil, there lies a key,
A chance to shape what's yet to be.
Through wisdom's lens, the chains may break,
And liberation's dawn awake.

From the veil of ignorance, a spark unfolds,
Through unseen doors, the mind remolds.
The threads of past, both bright and frayed,
Weave a tapestry the present obeyed.

Beyond the veil of ignorance, there lies the key,
A chance to shape what's yet to be.
Through wisdom's lens, ignorance will break,
For there it will be that freedom's dawn will awake.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Birth Beyond the Veil"

This image for **"Birth Beyond the Veil"** is, I must say, a strikingly ambitious attempt to capture the perennial human fascination with transcendence, the cyclical nature of existence, and our quest for liberation from the heavy woes of life. I can't imagine that this was not an easy subject to illustrate without descending into cliché or sentimentality, but this piece has a precision, even a severity, that commands attention.

To the left, we see the machinery of life and death—the great wheel of samsara (birth, suffering and death)—turning relentlessly. It's crammed with intricate depictions of the everyday grind: people laboring, suffering, rejoicing, and, inevitably, dying. The circular arrangement of these scenes reflects the endless cycle of actions and consequences, reminiscent of the poem's line: *"The wheel turns on, but we can rise."* It is an unforgiving portrayal, one that refuses to romanticize the reality of existence. This is no fluffy spirituality; it's an honest depiction of the human condition, driven by cause and effect.

The dividing line—what the poem calls the "veil"—is wonderfully understated. It doesn't shout at you, but its significance is clear: the divide between the mundane and the transcendent. And through it, a figure ascends. Now, this is where things get interesting. The figure isn't escaping in some ecstatic flight; it's deliberate, purposeful. The imagery suggests that liberation isn't granted or gifted—**it's earned**, achieved through what the poem describes as *"…wisdom's light, the links dissolve."*

On the right side, the composition shifts dramatically. The chaotic spirals of samsara give way to clean, vertical lines of light—a deliberate contrast, evoking clarity and simplicity after complexity and struggle. The ascending figure is now radiant, a symbol of awakening, the poem's *"…boundless sky of endless blue."* It's not hard to see the attraction of this imagery: the promise of release from the incessant demands of the wheel, the tantalizing possibility of stepping beyond it all.

And let's not overlook the doves, the orbs of light, and the ripples below. They add a touch of what I see as a sort of cosmic harmony. The ripples, in particular, are a clever inclusion—they remind me that even in the awakening of the mind and the dissolving of ignorance, there's an acknowledgment of what came before, of the actions and consequences that ripple outward, even as one ascends beyond them.

I think that the brilliance of this image lies in its refusal to offer a simplistic or sentimental view of liberation. It doesn't ask you to abandon reason or reality. Instead, it challenges you to see the starkness of existence, to confront the relentless cycles of life, and to recognize that liberation, if it's to be found at all, requires effort, courage, and an unflinching acceptance of what is. In that sense, this infers, to me, that the image isn't just a visual representation of the poem—it's rather a call to action, or perhaps, a call to awakening the mind. It's a reminder that if freedom is to be achieved, it will be through understanding and determination, not wishful thinking. Now, I think that's something worth contemplating.

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Momentum of Life

The wheel turns, relentless, vast,
A cycle born of future and past.
In clinging grasp, the seed takes hold,
A tale unwritten, yet fiercely told.

Desire ignites the spark within,
A flame that feeds on loss and win.
Each craving binds, each choice reshapes,
The form we take, the path it makes.

Momentum builds, the rhythm flows,
Through birth, through death, it never slows.
The push of deeds, the pull of thought,
Becomes the weave where fate is wrought.

Through time's great loom, we rise, we fall,
The echoes answering nature's call.
A wave, a breath, a fleeting light,
Spiraling forth through day and night.

Yet in the rush, a truth resides—
The force that drives, the stream that guides,
Can shift, can still, if wisdom's hand,
Unfolds the threads, unbinds the strand.

The momentum of life, such a ceaseless hum,
Tied to the actions from which life is spun.
But in its motion lies the ways,
To rise, to free, to greet the days.

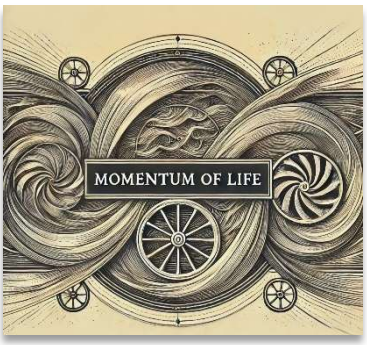

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Momentum of Life"

Look at this image for **"The Momentum of Life,"** wow, what an image. This image struck me like no other that Dīpa has created. What strikes me first is the overwhelming dynamism of it all—the sheer energy radiating from every corner of the composition. At its center, a massive, intricately detailed wheel dominates the scene, spinning with an almost terrifying momentum. I asked Dīpa what this wheel symbolizes, because it is not a symbol for the Eightfold Path or dependent origination. He said that, in his mind, it is a wheel representing the totality of Dhamma. "Everything is Dhamma," he explained. So, this is no idle ornament; it is the very embodiment of existence in motion, echoing the poem's meditation on life as an unstoppable force driven by volition, craving, and action.

The wheel itself—layered, ornate, and filled with smaller wheels and interlocking spokes—symbolizes the cyclical nature of life and samsara (birth, aging and death). It's not merely turning in a vacuum; it's dragging people along with it. Some figures cling desperately to the rim, struggling to maintain their grip, while others are flung outward into chaos. This brings to mind the lines, *"Through craving's fire, the metal bends, / And thus the chain extends, extends."* The wheel is both a vehicle of propulsion and a relentless mechanism of entrapment, depending on how one interacts with it.

Looking to the base of the image, I see figures caught in the surging waves below, swept up by the sheer force of the wheel's movement. The waves themselves are symbolic, representing the uncontrollable flow of actions and their consequences—the karmic currents that carry us whether we wish to be carried or not. The imagery here perfectly captures the sense of inevitability described in the poem: *"In fires unseen, the links are cast, / Actions mold the future from the past."*

And then there's the striking contrast above the wheel. Figures rise toward the light, their forms illuminated and seemingly unburdened by the chaos below. These are not mere survivors; they are liberated beings, transcending the relentless momentum of the wheel. Their ascent reflects the poem's suggestion of hope: *"Break ignorance, and light will rise, / Clearing the mist before our eyes."* They are a reminder that while the wheel turns with frightening force, it is possible to step beyond it, to find clarity and freedom through mindfulness and understanding.

The storm clouds, the crashing waves, and the radiant light all add to the image's drama, underscoring the stakes involved in this journey. This is definitely not a neutral depiction—it's charged, as all of life itself is charged, with energy, struggle, and the possibility of transcendence. This image, with its motion, doesn't ask you to passively admire it; it demands that you confront the forces propelling your own existence. Are you clinging to the wheel? Are you swept in the waves? Or have you glimpsed the possibility of rising above it all? It's a call to reflection, action, and perhaps, liberation. There's nothing timid about it, and in that, it mirrors the uncompromising spirit of the poem itself.

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Paths Unseen

Beneath the stars, the paths diverge,
Threads of fate in currents surge.
Where will you go, where will you tread,
What steps were shaped by words once said?

The heavens call with radiant light,
Realms of peace, realms of flight.
Yet shadows stir in valleys low,
Where pain and grief in silence grow.

Each thought, each act, a turning key,
Unlocking worlds we cannot see.
The karmic streams, unseen yet clear,
Flow to realms both far and near.

Some paths wind through gilded halls,
Where joy resounds, and sunlight falls.
Others lead to trials steep,
Through caves of woe where sorrows seep.

The human heart, the beast's fierce roar,
The angel's wings, the demon's war.
Infinite worlds, a boundless maze,
Shaped by the torch of karmic blaze.

Yet in this web of unseen ways,
A truth shines bright, a guiding blaze:
The paths are formed by what we do,
Each choice, a stone, the path renewed.

So, walk with care, and walk with grace,
For every act defines your place.
In realms of joy or sorrow's sheen,
The future lies on paths unseen.

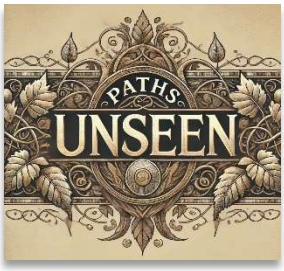

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Paths Unseen"

With Dīpabhasadhamma's image for **"Paths Unseen,"** well, I feel that it is a striking visualization of the journey we all traverse—whether consciously or not—through the landscapes of kamma, rebirth, and choice. It took me a while to contemplate the meaning of this image. I admit having to read the poem several times to understand the imagery. Many of his drawings contain winding paths or meandering streams, which leads me to think "journey." Contemplating its composition, I experienced a sense of humility, humbling me as much as it provoked my thoughts. At first glance, the expanse is vast, infinite even, with winding paths carving through a terrain of mountains and mist. Each pathway bends, twists, and loops, disappearing into the horizon, evoking the layered complexity of existence and the unseen destinations that lie ahead.

The central focus is the convergence of these paths, spiraling into a radiant core at the upper horizon. This swirling light seems to call to something deep within, representing the ultimate goal of liberation—freedom from the cycles of samsara. The poem speaks of *"...paths unseen, carved by deeds unknown,"* and the image illustrates this beautifully, with each route suggesting a unique

karmic trajectory shaped by past actions. It's a reminder that our journeys, though seemingly solitary, are interconnected through the shared fabric of kamma.

The cosmic background is breathtaking, filled with spiraling galaxies and luminous stars. These celestial elements serve to reinforce the universality of the message: that our choices echo not only through this life but across realms and rebirths, far beyond the physical and into the metaphysical. The interconnected spirals in the sky mirror the winding paths on the ground, showing how what is above reflects what is below—our actions on Earth reverberating through cosmic cycles. However, in discussing this image with Dīpa, he said that, because of the weight of artistic religious iconography throughout the ages, he is afraid that people will attach more meaning to the imagery than is actually there. He hoped that people would realize that his imagery is directly connected to the verses in his poems and not to some iconographic consensus of metaphorical references of worlds beyond those of human existence.

In the image, I noticed that the paths themselves aren't uniform. Some are smooth, others rugged, which I think reflects the varying degrees of ease or hardship encountered on one's journey. This directly ties to the line in the poem: *"Each step, a ripple, an echo unfolds, / Winding toward realms of bliss or woe."* The undulating forms suggest a lack of finality, emphasizing that no single action seals one's fate; it is the accumulation of intentions and deeds that charts the course.

At the edges, the shadowed mountains loom like silent witnesses to the countless lives and choices that have passed through this terrain. They suggest permanence, even as the paths themselves constantly shift. The interplay of shadow and light reminds us of the dual nature of existence: ignorance and wisdom, craving and release, suffering and peace.

This image doesn't just depict a journey—it invites me to consider my own. Which path am I on? What unseen consequences lie ahead? And, perhaps most importantly, which road should I take? On reflection of both the image and the poem, a question kept repeating in my mind; "What does my life represent? How have my intentions carved the paths of my life?"

The overwhelming scale of the image isn't meant to intimidate but to inspire, to remind us that while the paths may be unseen, the direction is within our control. It's a visual call to mindfulness, urging us to walk with care, intention, and the hope of one day reaching that luminous center where all paths dissolve into freedom. We can take the mindful path or we can endlessly wander on this road and that, only ever hoping that we will find freedom, safety, and happiness.

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Chain of Becoming

In shadows cast, the cycle turns,
A flame ignites, a fire burns.
From ignorance blooms thought's first seed,
Craving stirs, and deeds proceed.

Through sights and sounds, the senses bind,
The threads of life in thought confined.
Each grasping hand, each fleeting taste,
Shapes the form the future's faced.

In fires unseen, the links are cast,
Actions mold the future from the past.
Each deed, each thought, each word we say,
Shapes the chain that guides our way.

From ignorance blooms the spark's first flare,
Forging bonds that grip and snare.
Through craving's fire, the metal bends,
And thus the chain extends, extends.

Dependent links, a woven chain,
Of joy, of sorrow, loss, and gain.
From birth to death, from death anew,
The chain reflects what we pursue.

Yet in the links, a truth resides,
A path unseen where freedom hides.
Break but one, and all will fall,
The chain of becoming dismantled for all.

Through wisdom sharp and insight deep,
We wake from dreams, from ignorance steeped.
Meditation's forge reveals the truth,
That each becoming shapes our youth.

Not fixed, not fated, but freely made,
The chain of bhavana, our path laid.
Break ignorance, and light will rise,
Clearing the mist before our eyes.

Each link dissolved, the cycle fades,
And peace endures where shadows wade.
So let us forge with wisdom's flame,
A chain that bears no guilt or shame.

Each mindful act, a golden ring,
Each link a song the heart can sing.
The chain of becoming holds no sway,
When mindfulness guides our way.
From cause to end, the path is clear—
Freedom blooms as we draw near.

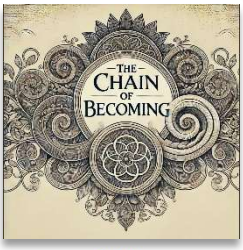

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Chain of Becoming"

Looking at this image, **"The Chain of Becoming,"** feels like stepping into the visual architecture of existence itself. How does he do it? It's as though Dīpa sees the Dhamma visually. It is almost haunting to see his images at times. This image is intricate, mesmerizing, and daunting—a perfect reflection of dependent origination, that core teaching of the Buddha that lays bare the mechanics of how suffering perpetuates itself and, crucially, how it can be undone. My first impression is one of awe, not just for the sheer craftsmanship but for the depth of insight it embodies. This isn't just a drawing; it's a map of life's entanglements.

At the center of it all is a luminous mandala-like structure, a wheel of becoming that churn with the energy of life. Its spokes and patterns radiate outward like the ripples of causality, touching everything in their path. It draws you in, compelling you to contemplate your own place within this cosmic dance. Immediately, I'm struck by the tension: the wheel both fascinates and terrifies. It's beautiful, yes, but also relentless, embodying the ceaseless momentum of existence, just as the poem describes: *"From ignorance blooms the spark's first flare, / Forging bonds that grip and snare."*

Encircling the central wheel are chains, heavy and interlinked, wrapping around the image like a constricting serpent. I think that each link is a reminder of kamma, the actions that bind us to this cycle. The chain connects various scenes, each representing a stage of dependent origination. Here we see the seeds of ignorance, the fires of craving, the senses awakening to the world, and the blossoms of attachment and becoming. Each stage is beautifully and painstakingly rendered, and it's impossible to look at these individual vignettes without feeling a pang of recognition—these are not abstract concepts; they are us.

What captures my attention most is the circle containing flames—flickering, consuming, and ever-present. They burn with an almost hypnotic intensity, representing craving, that insatiable force that drives the wheel forward. And yet, they're not wholly destructive. There's a suggestion of purification, of transformation, as if the flames could just as easily illuminate as incinerate. It's a reminder of the poem's wisdom: *"Through wisdom's flame, intention shifts, / And light through shadows gently sifts."*

The imagery spirals outward into the cosmic void—stars, swirling galaxies, and the infinite expanse of space. This backdrop underscores the vastness of samsara, the sense that this cycle of becoming extends beyond any single lifetime, beyond any single world. And yet, amidst this overwhelming vastness, there's something deeply personal about the image. Each link in the chain, each vignette, feels like an intimate reflection of the human condition. It's as if the image is whispering, *"This is you. This is all of us."*

What I find most striking, though, is the juxtaposition of beauty and burden. The chains are heavy, yes, but they're also exquisitely detailed, almost ornamental. The wheel is relentless, yet its patterns are mesmerizing. There's a profound truth in this: the things that bind us can also captivate us, making it harder to let go. And yet, the image holds a glimmer of hope. If chains can be forged, they can also be broken. If the wheel turns, it can also stop. The path to liberation is here, hidden within the very mechanisms of suffering.

This image just doesn't just depict the chain of becoming; it invites you to feel it, to experience the weight of it and the possibility of release. It's a visual meditation on the cycles that shape us, and a call to action to step off the wheel and into the light of freedom. It lingers in the mind long after you've looked away, challenging you to confront your own chains and consider how you might unmake them. For me, it's not just an image—it's a mirror, a map, and a reminder of what's at stake.

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Ripples of Deeds

A pebble dropped in a quiet stream,
Ripples outward, touching the unseen.
A word, a glance, a fleeting choice,
Echoes far with a silent voice.

A hand extended, a kindness small,
Can lift a heart that starts to fall.
But just as swift, a careless slight,
Can darken skies, obscure the light.

The weight of a deed is not its size,
But the unseen path where its power lies.
A seed may fall in fertile earth,
And birth a forest of endless worth.

Or cast in shadows, where roots won't take,
It withers alone, for its own sake.
The smallest flame can light the dark,
Or scorch a field with its fiery spark.

Do we not see in each day's flow,
The chances to heal, the harm we sow?
Each act we choose, each thought we feed,
Bears the weight of a growing deed.

So, tread with care, with hearts aware,
Of threads we weave, of burdens we bear.
For what seems fleeting, light as air,
May shape a world beyond compare.

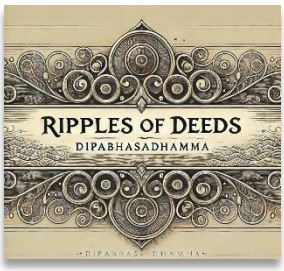

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Ripples of Deeds"

I have now worked through several poems and been asked to write these analytical commentaries. Each time I see a new image I am struck, not only by the beauty and artistic craftsmanship, but by Dīpa's ability to transfer an idea into an image. Perhaps it's amazing to me because I cannot fathom being able to do it myself. So, for me, this image **"Ripples of Deeds,"** feels like an invitation to sit down beside the water's edge and truly contemplate the immense significance of every action I take. It's serene, luminous, yet undeniably profound—a reminder that even the smallest touch can send waves that reverberate far beyond what we can see. At its heart, this image is a meditation on the interconnectedness of all things, much like the poem it represents.

The central focus of the image is a still, reflective pond, its surface pierced by a single, deliberate act—a hand dropping a pebble. The ripples fan outward in perfect circles, growing wider and more expansive as they reach the edges of the water. This is the very essence of the poem: *"A pebble dropped, a quiet stream / Sends ripples through the vast unseen."* The hand is gentle but deliberate, suggesting the intentionality behind actions and the inevitability of their effects.

Beyond the rippling water, the horizon glows with an ethereal light, its brilliance mirrored in the water below. This duality—the light above and its reflection below—speaks to the alignment of cause and effect, of thought and action. It reminds us that our deeds are not isolated; they are reflections of our inner intentions, shaping not only the outer world but the world within. This reflects the lines: *"Each thought, each word, each fleeting deed, / A ripple sent, a life to lead."*

On the far bank of the pond, a row of serene figures sits in quiet contemplation, their silhouettes imbued with a sense of wisdom and tranquility. They seem to be witnesses to the ripple's journey, embodying the practice of mindfulness—of observing the unfolding of actions without interference. The figures are still, but the ripples move, reminding us that mindfulness doesn't stop the effects of our actions; it helps us understand them.

The tree to the left of the composition is robust and deeply rooted, a symbol of stability and growth. Its branches stretch outward, echoing the expanding ripples in the water, suggesting that actions, like seeds, can grow into something far greater than their origins. This, I think, indicates the expression of the natural rhythms of kamma, reinforcing the idea that the smallest deeds shape the largest outcomes.

Framing the entire scene is a border of swirling patterns and symbols, a visual representation of life's interconnectedness. The ornate designs feel almost alive, as if they, too, are part of the ripple effect, reminding us that nothing exists in isolation. Even the smallest symbol feels deliberate, reflecting the care and mindfulness that the poem urges us to adopt in our own actions.

What strikes me most is how balanced the image feels—light and shadow, stillness and motion, simplicity and complexity. It's a quiet yet powerful reminder that every action, no matter how small, carries weight. The pebble dropped into the pond, to me, represents a choice, and the ripples it creates are the echoes of that choice, rippling outward into infinity. The image invites me to pause, reflect, and consider: What kind of ripples am I, are we, sending into the world? It's a question that lingers long after the image fades from view.

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Freedom's Key

A chain of links, both forged and worn,
From ages past to lives unborn.
Each thought, each act, a spark that binds,
The self to shadows, the heart confined.

Yet in this chain, a truth concealed,
A door awaits to be revealed.
Through wisdom's light, the links dissolve,
The cycle breaks, the wounds absolve.

Dependent paths, once tightly gripped,
Can falter when awareness slips.
See the craving, trace the cause,
Undo the bind, escape the laws.

No fire can burn, no storm can sway,
A mind that walks the mindful way.
Each step, each breath, a key to free,
A path to truth, to clarity.

The wheel turns on, but we can rise,
Beyond the veil, past earthly ties.
Awakening dawns, the path is clear,
Freedom blooms as we draw near.

Seek the key to a lock undone,
The light of wisdom, like the sun.
From bound to free, from blind to sight,
Walk the path and find the light.

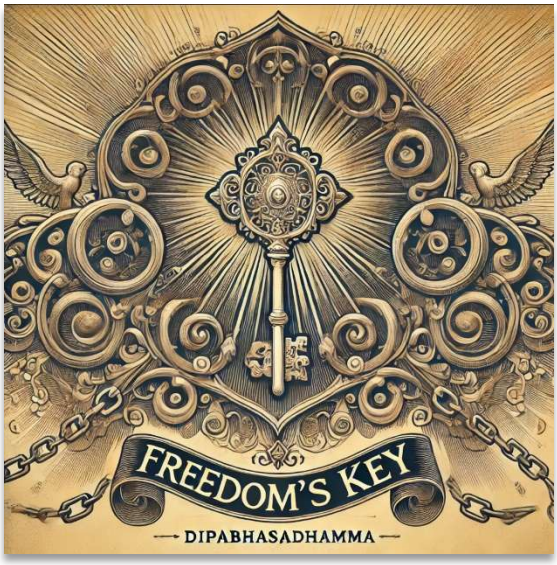

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Freedom's Key"

Dīpabhasadhamma converses with those who are tasked with writing an analysis of his drawings in connection with the poem. Each poem teaches, and each illustration fortifies the focus of the poems he writes. His images are frequently nothing short of a masterstroke—particularly with the image for the poem, "Freedom's Key," at once is hauntingly beautiful and provocatively insightful. It doesn't just illustrate the poem; it demands an audience, forces you to confront the existential reality of chains and their breaking. It's the visual equivalent of being handed the very key it portrays and asked, "Well, what are you waiting for?"

The image, like the poem, is a forceful repudiation of the trite misconceptions often attached to the concept of freedom. Let us begin with the key itself, crowned by the unmistakable symbol of the Eightfold Path—a wheel with eight spokes that pierces through the murk of human delusion. This is not some decorative bauble, nor is it an empty metaphor. The Eightfold Path is the foundation of the Buddha's teaching, the practical, almost ruthlessly pragmatic roadmap to

liberation. Its presence as the head of the key declares that freedom is neither granted nor stumbled upon—it is forged through disciplined effort, through the cultivation of wisdom, ethics, and mental clarity.

Below, the chain slithers its way toward the figure at the base—a lone individual standing in quiet defiance of the bonds that once ensnared them. The chain is not just any chain; its weight is deliberate, each link symbolizing attachment, craving, and ignorance—the three poisons that perpetuate the wheel of samsara. But the brilliance of this image lies in the fracture, the point where the chain gives way to light. This is not the light of divine intervention, nor the faux-enlightenment peddled by those who confuse momentary bliss with enduring insight. No, this is the light of understanding, the blinding clarity that comes when one sees the world and the self as they truly are—impermanent, interdependent, and devoid of an enduring essence.

The sepia tones of the image lend it an air of timelessness, a visual reminder that the struggle for liberation is as old as humanity itself. Yet the modernity of the scene—its sharp, almost mechanical precision—reminds us that the teachings of the Buddha are not relics of the past. They remain profoundly relevant, particularly in a world where new chains are forged daily in the fires of consumerism, social media, and political division.

And then there is the figure itself moving toward the Eightfold Path—neither glorified nor diminished, but human in its unadorned resolve. This is no saint, no otherworldly sage. This is you, me, and everyone else who dares to confront the inertia of a life unexamined. The light that streams toward the figure's heart is not external; it emanates from within, a testament to the self-reliance the Buddha so often extolled. There is no savior here, no god to rescue you from your suffering. There is only the path, and your own determination to walk it.

"Freedom's Key," as the poem and image make abundantly clear, is not a gift—it is a hard-won victory. It is the reward for breaking the bonds of ignorance and for grasping the truth that true liberation lies not in escape, but in profound understanding. This image, like the poem, does not pander to sentimentality or false hope. It challenges us, forces us to reckon with the uncomfortable truth that the key to our freedom has always been in our hands.

The centerpiece of the image is, naturally, the key itself—a resplendent artifact suspended in light, radiating power, and inviting reflection. It is ornate yet functional, a perfect embodiment of what the poem calls *"freedom's key."* And there it hangs, bathed in luminous energy, floating above a lone figure dwarfed by its brilliance. That solitary figure below is unmistakably human, every person weighed down by the heavy chain that trails behind them. The visual juxtaposition here is striking: the potential for liberation above and the burden of bondage below. One almost hears the whispered question: *"Will you reach for it?"*

The chain is visceral, almost tactile in its weight. It anchors the figure to the ground, yet its links are loose, a subtle nod to the possibility of breaking free. This chain isn't just physical; it's psychological, karmic, and existential, reflecting the binding force of ignorance, craving, and aversion. As the poem suggests, *"From ignorance bound, through wisdom freed."* The symbolism is unmistakable: the key above offers release, but the choice to grasp it must come from within.

What captivates me most, however, is the duality of light and shadow. The light is concentrated, almost overwhelmingly so, around the key and its radiance. This isn't a soft, forgiving glow; it's sharp, piercing, and uncompromising. It doesn't just illuminate—it exposes. The shadows below, by contrast, are heavy and consuming, embodying the inertia of ignorance and suffering. It's as if the image itself is saying, *"Here is the truth, plain and unvarnished: the way is clear, but it is not easy."*

In the end, the image is as much a mirror as it is an artwork. It invites you to see yourself in that solitary figure, to feel the weight of your own chains and to question why, with the key so close, you still hesitate. It doesn't preach or promise. It simply presents the truth—raw, luminous, and uncompromising—and leaves the rest to you. It's not merely a piece of art; it's a dare. The key, the Eightfold Path, is the key to freedom. We need only the courage to turn it.

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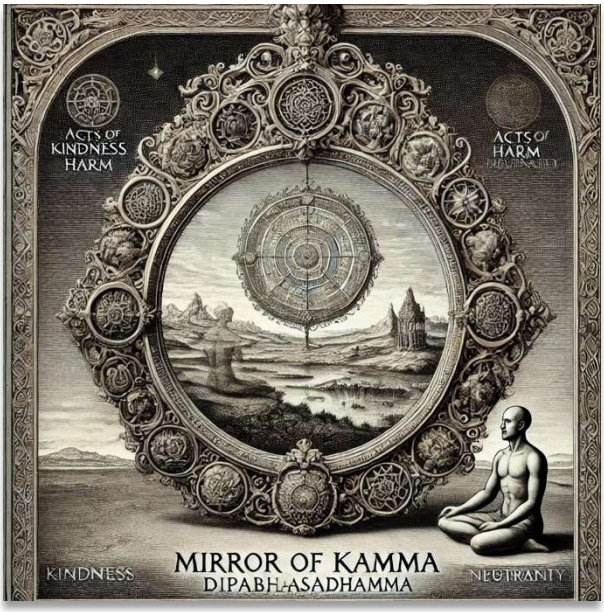
Mirror of Kamma



A chain of links, both forged and worn,
From ages past to lives unborn.
Each thought, each act, a spark that binds,
The self to shadows, the heart confined.

Yet in this chain, a truth concealed,
A door awaits to be revealed.
Through wisdom's light, the links dissolve,
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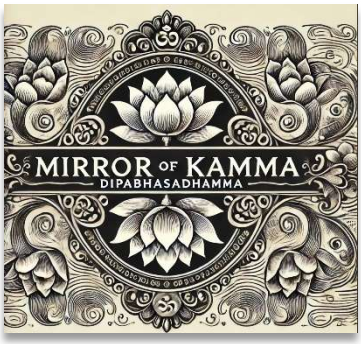


Image Symbolism of the Poem "Mirror of Kamma"

I decided to write the commentary about the image for **"Mirror of Kamma"** myself because this poem has a special significance for me. It touches on the essence of what the Buddha taught about kamma—not as some abstract idea, but as a direct reflection of our daily actions and intentions. When I am focused, and find myself being mindfully aware, I ask myself, "What is the significance of my actions, right now?" Sometimes, there is no significance. My actions are neutral. But, at times, when I am not so mindfully awake, my actions are certainly connected to my intentions. I can reflect, go back in my mind and contemplate an action I took, calmly examining my intentions behind my actions and working out what kinds of consequences my actions might have; whether beneficial or not. I find that whenever I act on an intention that I am not entirely mindful of, they almost always tend to border on habitual thinking. But I imagine standing before a mirror that doesn't show my face but reveals the imprint of everything I've done, said, or thought. That's what this image is trying to convey. I have often envisioned this while meditating. Doing so grounds me in a mental space that recognizes there is no actual "me" in this picture, just the reflections of my actions.

I also find that when I peer into this Mirror of Kamma, and I am only able to see my own reflection, then I am focused on the existence of a "me." I find that when I can look into the Mirror of Kamma and can see only my actions without some connection to "me," a mental image of the person of "me," me the personality, "me" as some identity, then I am not practicing my understanding of the

Buddha's teachings of not-self or anatta. This exercise realigns my thinking and my focus. At times, the only affective thing I can do is to stop the exercise and metaphorically, walk away from the mirror.

But I digress. Back to the image. At the center, notice the mirror itself, encircled by intricate carvings. These carvings represent the forces of kindness, harm, and neutrality—three fundamental ways we interact with the world. This mirror doesn't flatter or hide anything; it simply reflects the truth. What you see in it isn't about judgment—it's about understanding—it's not about me, rather it's about what I do. When you look closely, you'll see how every action, no matter how small, leaves a mark, creating ripples that spread far beyond the moment.

Inside the mirror, there's a landscape. It's a mix of serenity and destruction, growth and decay. On one side, you have ruins, a stark reminder of how harmful actions can unravel everything. On the other, you have rivers and life flourishing, symbolizing the fruits of wholesome deeds. This duality is key—it shows us that kamma isn't about punishment or reward; it's about cause and effect. As the poem says, *"Each act a seed, each seed a tree, / Bearing fruit we may not see."* What we plant now will grow into our future.

Look at the meditating figure to the right. That's where we find the path forward—within yourself. It's not about escaping the mirror or hiding from what it shows. It's about sitting still, looking clearly, and learning from what's reflected.

I wanted the composure of the figure to remind us of the power of mindfulness and introspection. Without mindfulness, we're swept away by the cycles of our reactions to the phenomena of life; all of our unexamined actions, like the faint movements you can see I etched on the left side of the frame.

Speaking of the frame itself, its covered in circular motifs—each one a story, a moment, a choice. They symbolize samsara, the endless cycles we get caught in that are born from ignorant habits. But these cycles aren't permanent; they're just patterns. That's the beauty of the Buddha's teaching: if we created the patterns, we can uncreate them. The carvings aren't there to overwhelm us—they're there to remind us that we always have a choice.

At the bottom, you'll see the grounding words: kindness and neutrality. Kindness is what nourishes life and harmony. Harm does the opposite—it destroys and scatters. Neutrality doesn't mean apathy; it's the wisdom of equanimity—cool mental balance—the ability to act with clarity and intention rather than from impulsive habits.

The image is really asking us one question: what do we see in the mirror of our own lives? And perhaps more importantly, how do we want to shape what it shows tomorrow? This isn't about guilt or blame. It's about taking responsibility. Imagine a mirror that reflects only the consequences of our actions. That's where freedom begins—with looking at our reflection and choosing to act with care, mindfulness, and wisdom. That's what this poem, and this image, are all about.

Dīpabhasadhamma

The Singular Path

The Buddha spoke, with wisdom keen,
Of truths unseen, yet deeply serene.
"Dukkha binds all, a ceaseless tide,
But the path to freedom lies inside."

No savior waits, no hand descends,
No divine favor, no fateful ends.
The wheel of life turns by your will,
A path untread remains unfulfilled.

"Be islands unto yourselves," he said,
"Your own lamp lighting the path ahead.
No refuge found in others' grace,
But in the courage your heart must embrace."

Cling not to rites, to prayers, to creeds,
For they are but shells of hollow deeds.
The Eightfold Path is yours to tread,
Each step a truth, each action wed.

The craving, the clinging, the seeds of despair,
They sprout and flourish if left to the air.
Yet with resolve, with effort sincere,
The roots of suffering can disappear.

"Right view, right thought," the Buddha taught,
"The fabric of freedom in wisdom wrought.
Right speech, right action, a life aligned,
Right livelihood, pure and refined."

"Right effort, right mindfulness, calm and clear,
Right concentration, where truth appears.
These are the steps, the tools to apply,
Not gifts bestowed, but paths to try."

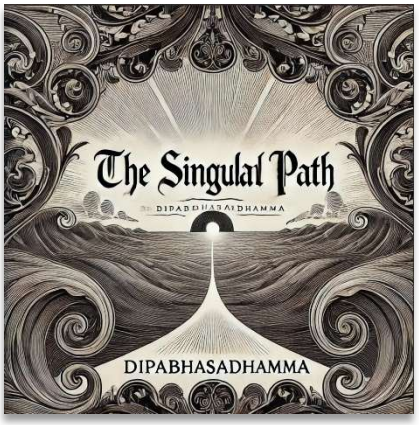
Oh seeker, beware the stagnant mind,
That waits for salvation, for time to unwind.
For the clock moves not to the idle plea,
Only effort unlocks what the heart can see.

The burden is yours, and yours alone,
To break the chains, to cast the stone.
To pierce the ignorance veil, to wake, to strive,
To know the truth, to truly arrive.

Inaction is death, a life in disguise,
An unlit lamp beneath darkened skies.
Take up the torch, ignite the flame,
Walk the path, or live in vain.

For the Buddha's words are a mirror bright,
Reflecting the self, its will, its plight.
Devotion is hollow without the deed,
The lotus blooms only where effort leads.

Oh seeker, stand and walk the way,
For no one else can make you stay.
Freedom is yours, a truth profound,
But only if you take the ground.



The Veil of Avijjā (Ignorance)

In this modern age of fleeting delight,
Where screens glow bright through the endless night,
The teachings of old seem far removed,
Yet ignorance thrives, its grasp unmoved.

The Buddha spoke of a deeper malaise,
Not mere unknowing, but a clouded haze—
A blindness to truths that pierce the heart,
Of suffering's cause, and the path to depart.

But see how ignorance takes new forms,
Even among those who vow to reform.
A chant recited, a ritual done,
Yet wisdom's light touches none.

For ignorance hides in prideful guise,
A scholar's words, a seeker's prize.
Endless debates of text and scroll,
Yet none have stilled the restless whole.

The Buddha taught: "See what is near,
The mind untrained breeds craving and fear."
Yet modern minds, in doctrine bound,
Fail to see the truths profound.

Some seek the path in worldly acclaim,
The robe, the title, the hollowed name.
"Look at me," they say, "I practice the Way,"
While clinging to self in every display.

Others, lost in spiritual greed,
Turn the Dhamma into a merchant's creed.
Selling silence, branding peace,
Ignorance thrives as wisdom flees.

Even those who sit in still retreat,
With eyes half-closed and folded feet,
Are not immune to the ego's snare,
If mindfulness lacks the wisdom to care.

For ignorance feeds on "I" and "mine,"
It clings to notions, it draws the line.
It says, "This is right," "That is wrong,"
Blind to the fact it plays along.

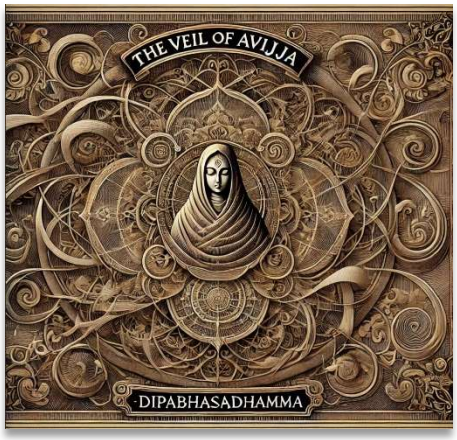
The Buddha's call was stark and clear:
"Be islands unto yourselves, sincere.
The truth is not in rites or creed,
But in the ending of craving's seed."

So modern seeker, pause and reflect,
Is your practice sharp, or is it wrecked?
Do you seek the truth, or play the part,
Caught in ignorance, blind to the heart?

To end this chain, look deep within,
Not at the world, nor others' sin.
Ignorance dies where wisdom grows,
Where the self dissolves, the Dhamma flows.

The path is simple, yet steep and bare,
To walk it demands the courage to care.
Not for doctrines, nor fame, nor gain,
But for the end of all clinging and pain.

So, leave behind the masks you wear,
Face the truth with a heart laid bare.
For in wisdom's light, ignorance flees,
And the path to freedom flows with ease.



About the Poem "Ther Veil of Avijjā"

Ignorance, or avijjā as the Buddha called it in the Pali language, is not merely a lack of knowledge. It is a willful blindness, a refusal to see things as they are. The poem "The Veil of Avijjā" wrestles with this concept, peeling back the layers of self-deception and exposing the subtle ways ignorance thrives, even among those who profess to follow the teachings of the Buddha. It draws us into the paradox of spiritual practice in the modern age, where the pursuit of awakening the mind often becomes tangled in the very snares it seeks to escape.

The poem opens with stark imagery, confronting the reader with the "two faces" of ignorance. It highlights how individuals—yes, even those seated cross-legged, wrapped in robes, or holding sacred texts—can be consumed by the very ego they claim to renounce. The verses, "Some seek the path in worldly acclaim, / The robe, the title, the hollowed name," paint a picture of practitioners who confuse external symbols of spirituality with genuine inner transformation. This is ignorance in its most insidious form: the ego masquerading as wisdom, the self-clinging to identity even in the guise of humility.

And what of the marketplace of the modern spiritual world? The poem spares no one, turning its lens on those who commodify the Dhamma. "Others, lost in spiritual greed, / Turn the Dhamma into a merchant's creed," it laments. Here, the Buddha's teachings—intended to dissolve attachment—are instead packaged and sold, transforming wisdom into a commodity. In this transactional approach to spirituality, the essence of the Dhamma is lost, drowned beneath glossy advertisements and promises of instant peace, mindfulness and calm abiding.

Yet the poem does not simply critique; it invites us to reflect. The "veil of avijjā" is not some external force. It is woven from our own fears, desires, and misconceptions. It is the lens through which we interpret the world, distorting reality to suit the narrative of the self. The poem asks us to consider: How often do we cling to identities, labels, or practices, not as tools for mental awakening, but as shields to protect the fragile ego? How often do we turn even the noblest ideals into chains that bind us?

The beauty of the poem lies in its universality. It does not point fingers; it holds up a mirror. It reminds us that ignorance is not an affliction of the unenlightened alone. It is a shadow that follows all of us, practitioners and skeptics alike. The final verses, which speak of "the veil that shrouds the heart and mind," are not a condemnation but a call to awaken—to see. To lift the veil, we must look deeply, not at others, but at ourselves. We must examine the subtle ways in which ignorance manifests in our thoughts, actions, and motivations.

In a modern context, the poem is strikingly relevant. We live in an age of endless information yet misunderstanding persists. Social media and the digital age have created new arenas for the ego to play its games, amplifying the very ignorance the Buddha warned against. Spirituality, too, has not escaped this tide. It is all too easy to collect teachings, titles, and retreats as badges of honor, while failing to confront the deeper truths of impermanence and non-self.

"The Veil of Avijjā" is a reminder that the path to liberation is not a performance. It is not about how we appear to others but about the quiet, often uncomfortable work of dismantling the self. The poem challenges us to see through the illusions we construct, to recognize that the only obstacle to freedom is the one we create ourselves.

In the words of the Buddha, "Ignorance is the root of all suffering." This poem beautifully and poignantly brings that teaching into the present, urging us to lift the veil, not just for a moment, but for a lifetime of clarity. And in doing so, it offers us not a critique, but a profound gift: the chance to see the world, and ourselves, as they truly are.

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Beyond the Cycle

Our wheel has turned through countless years,
Both paths of joy, and trail of tears.
Each step a print, each thought a flame,
Engraved within this shifting frame.

"By craving is the world bound," Buddha said,
"The fire burns where desires are fed."
From clinging hands, the wheel returns,
Yet in stillness, freedom yearns.

From craving's spark, the fire burns,
Through clinging hands, the wheel returns.
Yet in the stillness, one can see,
A truth unveiled, a path to free.

No grasp, no fear, no thread to bind,
A quiet mind, unchained, refined.
The echoes fade, the ripples still,
The heart unburdened, free of will.

And Buddha said, the cessation of craving, the path made clear,
Leads beyond birth, beyond all fear.
No birth, no death, no far, no near,
A peace that whispers, calm, sincere.

Beyond the cycle, vast and clear,
No birth, no death, no far, no near.
A peace that whispers, calm and true,
A boundless sky of endless hue.

The chains dissolve, the mind takes flight,
Through wisdom's gate, to endless light.
No shadows cast, no form to find,
The cycle ends, the heart aligned.
"No form to find, no shadows cast,
Beyond the cycle, freedom at last."

Awake, awake, and know the way,
Where suffering fades and light will stay.
Beyond the cycle, beyond the strife,
Lies freedom's realm, the deathless life.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Beyond the Cycle"

In this poem of the book "**A Handful of Leaves**," I decided to share my own reflections on the image for **"Beyond the Cycle,"** because it encapsulates the heart of what this poem seeks to express. This image is a journey—not just one to be viewed but one to be felt, contemplated, and ultimately lived. It is an invitation to look deeply into the path we tread, to consider the cycles that bind us, and to envision the peace that lies beyond them.

At the center of it all is the luminous sphere, a radiant, intricate symbol suspended in the vastness of the sky. This is not merely a decorative centerpiece; it is the symbol of liberation, the ultimate goal of transcending samsara. Its design, layered and interwoven, mirrors the complexity of the cycles we live within, yet its glow suggests simplicity and clarity at its core. It represents *nibbāna*—not as an abstract concept, but as the lived experience of freedom, as the dissolution of craving and ignorance—the blowing out of the flames of the ignorance that leads to suffering. It is the culmination of what the poem speaks to: *"Beyond the grasp, beyond the veil, / A boundless truth begins to sail."*

The path leading to the mandala winds through the landscape, tracing the journey each of us must take. Notice its serpentine twists and turns. This is not a straight path, for the road to liberation is neither easy nor direct. Each curve represents the choices we make, the moments of clarity and confusion, the persistence required to keep moving forward. The image invites the viewer to step into the shoes of the lone figure walking this path. This solitary traveler embodies introspection, courage, and resolve—a living testament to the poem's call to "walk the path, leave fear behind."

Surrounding the traveler are concentric ripples, like waves in a still pond, reminding us of the cycles we live within—cycles which we have created—cycles that center upon ourselves. These ripples are not chains, but echoes—remnants of the kamma we have created. They represent the subtle but powerful truths of cause and effect, of action and consequence. And yet, the figure moves through them, undeterred. The ripples are there, but they do not bind; they are part of the journey, not the destination.

There is meaning behind the landscape itself. It is vast, stretching infinitely toward the horizon. It is a reminder of the endless cycles of samsara—birth, death, and rebirth—that we traverse again and again. Yet, amidst this expanse, there are landmarks: a solitary tree to the left, a grove in the distance, mountains on the horizon. These elements anchor us in the present moment, reminding us that while the journey may feel infinite, it is lived one step at a time. The tree, deeply rooted and flourishing, symbolizes wisdom, growth, and stability—qualities that support the traveler's ascent beyond the cycle.

Notice the framing of the image, with its ornate details and interconnected symbols. This border suggests that even within the cycles of existence, there is a deeper interconnectedness, a beauty in the fabric of life. Yet the border does not enclose the mandala; it opens outward, reinforcing the idea that freedom lies beyond these boundaries. The poem echoes this sentiment: *"No walls, no edges hold the sky; / The truth beyond, the question why."*

Ultimately, I want this image not to be just a reflection of just any journey, but one directed toward liberating oneself from suffering—but also a mirror for the viewer. It asks: "Where are you on the path of life?" Are you standing still in the ripples, tangled in the cycles of becoming, or are you moving forward, step by deliberate step, toward the understanding the nature of reality? I want the image to invoke consideration of the weight of our actions, the clarity of our intentions, and the courage required to let go of what binds us.

"Beyond the Cycle" is not just a destination; it is a practice, a way of seeing, a way of being. This image, like the poem, is a quiet but simple invitation to pause, reflect, and take the next step. It reminds us that while the path may be long and winding, the light of correct knowledge is always there, waiting, just beyond the cycle of life.

Dīpabhasadhamma

Nibbana (Nirvana)

They call it bliss, a fleeting high,
A moment's joy beneath the sky.
But nibbāna speaks no fleeting tune,
Its truth lies far beyond the moon.

Not pleasure's peak, nor ecstasy's thrill,
But the quieting of the restless will.
It is not found in a passing gleam,
But in the ending of life's fevered dream.

Imagine the fire, its crackling song,
Fed by desire, burning strong.
Yet nibbāna whispers, soft and low,
"A fire unkindled is free to go."

To some, it is heaven, eternal and bright,
A radiant glow of unending light.
But nibbāna's heart is absence profound,
Where clinging ends, no self is bound.

The spark that fuels, the flame that feeds,
Are but the birth of endless needs.
And yet, to extinguish—not destroy—
Is to find a peace that holds no alloy.

It is not a place, no throne, no crown,
But the unbinding of all that weighs down.
No gods to thank, no prayers to say,
Just the stillness where burdens fall away.

Through the Noble Path the way is shown,
Not in visions or realms unknown.
But in steps of mindfulness, clear and true,
Where craving dissolves, and life renews.

So let the seeker hear this call:
Bliss may rise, but it too will fall.
Nibbāna is not what the senses crave,
But the freedom of one no longer enslaved.

To those who yearn for a fleeting cheer,
The Buddha's words ring calm and clear:
"What clings will bind, what binds brings pain,
Let go, and only peace remains."

Thus, nibbāna waits, not for the fire,
But for the end of fuel and desire.
No spark, no flame, no smoke, no ash,
Just the quiet where storms abash.

It is not the ecstasy of a fleeting hour,
But the stilling of samsara's power.
No momentary bliss, no transient glow,
But the timeless peace all seekers know.

Image Symbolism of the Poem "Nibbana"

After sitting with Dīpa, and listening to his explanation of this poem, I am now ready to comment on the picture that he created to represent the focus of "Nibbana." This image is clearly unapologetic in its symbolism, is a striking visualization of the poem and its mission to dismantle the romanticized misconceptions surrounding nibbāna. Nibbana, in Pali, and nirvana in Sanskrit, does not represent or mean a utopian bliss factory, no ethereal spa day for the mind. Instead, the central flame—unlit yet luminous—sits serenely atop the lotus, a flower born not from pristine waters but from the muck and mire. Here, in its grounded purity, the lotus embodies what so many fail to grasp: nibbāna is the cessation, not the indulgence, of desire. The flame is not a beacon to worship; it is a reminder of what the long list of what must be extinguished.

Encircling the flame are broken chains, their jagged edges a stark contrast to the meditative serenity of the lotus. These chains speak volumes, far more than any sentimental iconography of celestial heavens ever could. They symbolize the deliberate severance of ignorance, greed, and aversion—the three poisons that bind humanity to the cycle of samsāra. The poem's lines, "*What clings will bind, what binds brings pain*," echo in every fractured link. This is not freedom granted from above; it is wrestled for, link by link, through the hard work of insight and the razor-sharp clarity of the Eightfold Path.

The background is a void—not empty but swirling, alive with the subtle interplay of impermanence and interconnection. It is a visual rebuttal to the common saccharine fantasies of nirvana as a land of endless delight. No, this void is where the fire dies, where the fuel of craving is finally exhausted. It is, as the poem asserts, "*…the quiet where storms abash,*" not an addition to existence but the removal of the very conditions that perpetuate suffering.

The lotus blooms in delicate symmetry, each petal a whisper of the Eightfold Path—right view, right intention, right speech, and so forth. But this is no garish display of virtue-signaling. Instead, the petals radiate an understated power, suggesting that the Path itself is the only mechanism by which liberation is possible. It is an intricate but accessible truth: no shortcuts, no grace bestowed, just the ceaseless practice of mindfulness and effort.

And then there are the broken chains, again pulling the viewer's attention back to the ground, to the practical, and away from the mystical. These are not remnants of a dramatic battle but the natural result of understanding. When the fuel is gone, the fire simply cannot burn. The chains break not through violence but through the quiet power of letting go, the way a clenched fist opens without fanfare.

The image, like the poem, stands as a polemic against the lazy, misguided notion that nibbāna is a fleeting moment of bliss or some afterlife reward for enduring the tedium of existence. Instead, it is a call to arms—or rather, a call to disarm—against the internal tyranny of clinging and craving. It invites the viewer to sit with the discomfort of this truth, to see in the unlit flame not the promise of pleasure but the promise of peace.

In this visual rendering, there is no room for illusion, no sentimental veneer to soften the blow. It is, like nibbāna itself, unadorned and unrelenting. And yet, within its starkness lies the beauty of freedom—the kind of freedom that cannot be bought, bargained for, or bestowed but must be realized through the most challenging, honest work of all: *seeing reality as it truly is*.

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Infernal Dance

Beneath the sky of ceaseless storm,
Chaos is the norm,
A restless world spins, frantic, loud,
Each person a shadow lost in the crowd.

The tempest howls with its endless cry,
Of haste, of want, of "more"—but why?
Each fleeting thrill, each empty chase,
Leaves hollow echoes, a barren space.

The dance of haste, infernal, blind,
Sweeps heart and reason, warps the mind.
Envy grows like a spreading fire,
Burning all in its ceaseless desire.

The senses crave, the nerves demand,
As speed and greed stretch every hand.
Yet deeper still, a subtle plea,
"Is this all that life must be?"

For silence calls, a voice unseen,
A space untouched by the frantic machine.
The Buddha spoke of a way apart,
To still the storm, to calm the heart.

Inward lies the path so clear,
Where wisdom rises, free from fear.
Not in the fleeting, nor the fast,
But in the quiet, where truths hold fast.

Yet many dance this endless maze,
Building towers to their praise.
The self expands, its walls grown high,
While love grows scarce and compassion runs dry.

"Look at me!" they cry, their egos adorned,
While the core of their being is battered, worn.
The veil of ignorance shrouds their eyes,
Truth concealed by countless lies.

The storm, though fierce, is but a guise,
A test to see who will realize:
That beyond the clamor, the rush, the din,
Lies the silence—the truth within.

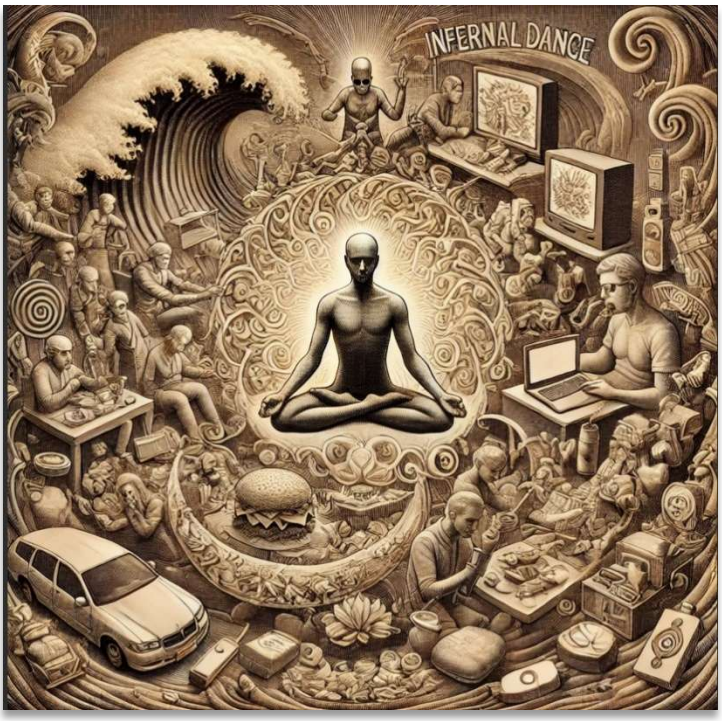
The stillness waits, a timeless grace,
Unmoved by the frantic, hollow race.
It speaks no words, yet whispers clear,
"Release the self, let wisdom steer."

For the dance is false, its steps untrue,
A rhythm forged from greed's debut.
Its pace enslaves, its beat ensnares,
But within the silence, freedom stares.

The Buddha's path—a middle way,
Where balance guides and shadows sway.
No clinging here, no desperate plea,
Just open hands and a mind set free.

Oh, seeker lost in the storm's embrace,
Pause and see the tempest's face.
Its roar is hollow, its fury vain,
A fleeting phantom, a passing strain.

Step from the storm, let the dance subside,
Find the calm where the heart can abide.
The storm will fade, the dance will cease,
And what remains is endless peace.



[i] **Editors Notes:**

Dipabhasadhamma's poem "Kamma Misunderstood" serves as both an exploration and a critique of how the concept of kamma (Pali for karma) is often misinterpreted, particularly in the modern world. The author weaves a lyrical yet philosophical narrative to disentangle the deep wisdom of kamma from the layers of myth, misrepresentation, and superficial understanding that obscure its essence. At its core, the poem seeks to clarify the Buddha's teachings on kamma, emphasizing its role as a natural, ethical law grounded in volition, rather than a mystical or deterministic force.
The opening lines establish the poem's central tension: the struggle of timeless truths to survive in a noisy, modern context that is filled with clashing ideologies and diluted interpretations. By painting a picture of kamma as "cloaked in myths," the author critiques its reduction to notions of "instant justice" or "cosmic play," ideas that trivialize the profound interplay between intent, action, and consequence.

A recurring theme in the poem is the emphasis on cetanā (intention) as the heart of kamma. The author skillfully contrasts this foundational principle with the widespread focus on outward actions alone. This misfocus, the poem suggests, leads to a misunderstanding of kamma as a simplistic tit-for-tat system, instead of the nuanced process of causation rooted in the ethical quality of one's motivations. Through evocative imagery—"It's not the hand, but what it wills"—the poem underscores the pivotal role of inner volition over mere external actions.

The author also dismantles the misconception that kamma binds individuals to a fixed destiny. Through lines like "No chains of fate, but freedom's call," the poem captures the liberating essence of the Buddha's teachings, where past actions influence but do not dictate the future. This affirmation of free will and ethical responsibility is a recurring refrain, countering fatalistic or deterministic interpretations that often cloud kamma's meaning.

A particularly striking aspect of the poem is its critique of how kamma struggles to find resonance in cultures dominated by divine judgments or fatalistic worldviews. The author juxtaposes the Buddha's naturalistic and non-theistic explanation of kamma with beliefs in divine intervention, showing how these distortions foster skepticism or rejection of its principles. The lines "No divine hand writes this law, but nature's truth, without a flaw," resonate as a clear statement of kamma's independence from theological frameworks.

Dipabhasadhamma artfully situates the teachings of kamma within a broader context of ethical living and mindfulness. Through the metaphor of life as a garden, the poem reminds readers of their role as gardeners, shaping their lives with every thought, word, and deed. This imagery not only reinforces the personal responsibility inherent in kamma but also evokes a sense of hope and possibility—"Each moment offers a chance to weave, "A brighter path, a world to conceive."
The poem's conversational tone is both accessible and didactic, making complex ideas about kamma relatable without diminishing their depth. The rhetorical questions and direct appeals to the reader—"Amid the din, how can one hear," The quiet law so plain, so clear?"—invite reflection and engagement, emphasizing that understanding kamma is not just an intellectual pursuit but a transformative journey.

Ultimately, "Kamma Misunderstood" is a clarion call for clarity, encouraging a return to the authentic teachings of the Buddha. It presents kamma as an empowering framework for ethical self-transformation rather than a punitive mechanism or mystical decree. Through its thoughtful exploration of misconceptions and its reaffirmation of core principles, the poem offers a luminous guide for navigating life with wisdom, freedom, and mindfulness.

Why Modern People Find Kamma Difficult to Grasp

1. Misrepresentation in Popular Culture:
    - Kamma is often reduced to a form of cosmic revenge or "instant justice" (e.g., "What goes around comes around"), which oversimplifies its depth and leads to misunderstandings.
    - Media representations often distort kamma into a linear, almost magical mechanism that operates in a tit-for-tat manner, ignoring its broader implications of intentionality and moral causation.
2. Confusion with Determinism or Fate:
    - Many assume that kamma implies predestination or fatalism, believing that everything in life is already determined by past actions, which contradicts the Buddha's teachings on personal agency and the ability to shape the future.
3. Interference from Religious Dogma:
    - In societies influenced by Abrahamic religions, the concept of kamma can clash with notions of divine will, sin, or grace, leading to skepticism or outright rejection of its moral framework.
4. Lack of Understanding of Intention (Cetanā):
    - The central role of cetanā (volition or intention) in kamma is often overlooked. People focus on external actions rather than the inner motivations driving them, missing the nuance of ethical causality.
5. Overwhelmed by Cultural Noise:
    - The modern world bombards individuals with conflicting worldviews, social norms, and misinformation, making it difficult for people to discern authentic teachings from cultural clutter.

Explanation of Kamma in Simple Terms

1. What It Is Not
    - Kamma is not punishment or reward handed down by a deity or external force.
    - It is not a fixed destiny or unavoidable fate.
    - It is not about judging others but understanding oneself.
2. Kamma Clearly Defined
    - Kamma means intentional action. It refers to the choices we make—what we think, say, and do—and the ripple effects those choices create.
    - The Buddha taught that our actions shape our experiences, not because of supernatural forces, but due to the natural law of cause and effect.
3. Practical Examples
    - Mental kamma: "If you hold onto anger, you feel stress and unhappiness. If you cultivate kindness, you feel peace and connection."
    - Verbal kamma: "Speaking harshly might hurt someone and lead to conflict, while speaking kindly fosters trust and harmony."
    - Physical kamma: "Helping someone in need creates goodwill, while harming others brings fear and suffering into your life."
4. Emphasis on Personal Responsibility
    - Kamma isn't about blame—it's about empowerment. It reminds us that we have the ability to shape our lives through our choices.
    - Unlike deterministic systems, the Buddha's teaching on kamma includes the possibility of change and growth. If you've made mistakes, you can create new, wholesome kamma starting now.
5. Connection to Modern Values
    - Relate kamma to psychological concepts like mindfulness or cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT): "Your thoughts, words, and actions create patterns in your mind, just as habits shape your life."
    - Highlight the importance of ethical living: "Kamma is about being mindful of how you treat others and yourself because your actions leave a lasting impact."
6. Misconceptions Addressed

- If someone views kamma as too abstract, explain that it operates naturally, much like planting seeds in a garden. "Good seeds produce good fruit; bad seeds produce thorns. The garden reflects the care you've given it."
- For those who see kamma as punitive, emphasize its neutrality: "It's not about punishment—it's about understanding consequences and learning how to make better choices."

Why This Explanation Matters

A modern person saturated with conflicting religious, social, and cultural ideas often seeks clarity, simplicity, and relevance. By framing kamma as a practical, natural law rooted in intention and cause-and-effect, it becomes less about dogma and more about personal empowerment and responsibility.

Editor's Critique: The poem "Kamma: The Weaver's Thread" offers a poetic yet deeply philosophical exploration of the Buddha's teachings on kamma, grounding its insights in the Pali Canon. Dipabhasadhamma, the author of this work, intricately unravels the concept of kamma, presenting it as a dynamic process governed by cetanā (volition), rather than as a fatalistic or externally imposed law. This shift in perspective underscores the agency and responsibility inherent in human life—a central theme of the Buddha's teachings.

What distinguishes this poem is its capacity to transform complex doctrinal teachings into vivid and accessible imagery. The metaphor of the "weaver's thread" symbolizes the intentional actions that intertwine to create the fabric of our lives, reflecting the causality of our thoughts, words, and deeds. Dipabhasadhamma contrasts acts of kindness, depicted as flourishing gardens, with harmful deeds that yield barren, thorny landscapes. This duality underscores the moral implications of kamma while inviting the reader to engage with its ethical dimensions on a personal level.

The poem does more than describe kamma; it critiques passive interpretations of this law. By aligning closely with the Nibbedhika Sutta and the Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta, the poet challenges deterministic views, encouraging readers to see kamma as a tool for self-transformation rather than an immutable fate. The emphasis on mindfulness and ethical living as pathways to transcendence reflects the Buddha's teaching that liberation from saṃsāra is attainable through effort and wisdom.

One of the poem's strongest messages is its portrayal of kamma as both a force of connection and liberation. The imagery of an illuminated path leading beyond the wheel of rebirth evokes the profound truth that while kamma governs worldly existence, understanding and transcending it is key to ultimate freedom. The title "Kamma: The Weaver's Thread" reinforces this focus, highlighting the personal agency involved in shaping one's life and future, for we are the weaver.

Dipabhasadhamma's work stands out as a meditation and critique, offering a fresh lens through which to view the Buddha's teachings. By challenging misconceptions and inspiring reflection, "Kamma: The Weaver's Thread" serves as both a philosophical guide and an artistic homage to the transformative power of intentional action. It invites readers to actively engage with the moral and liberative potential of the Buddha's insights, making it a compelling and enduring contribution to contemporary Dhamma thought. – Panna Foundation Publishing, S.M. Editor

ii Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta (MN 135) (Choo-la, kah-mah, vee-bahn-gah). The key teaching is that kamma functions through volition (cetanā), emphasizing moral responsibility and the ability to influence future outcomes. The Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta (MN 135) from the Majjhima Nikāya, often titled "The Shorter Exposition of Kamma," provides a detailed explanation of how intentional actions (kamma) lead to specific outcomes in a person's life. It addresses the apparent inequalities and differences among beings, such as why some are wealthy while others are poor, why some are beautiful while others are not, and why some experience happiness while others face suffering.

Key Insights from the Sutta:

1. Kamma as the Root of Inequalities: The Buddha explains that differences among beings arise from their actions, which are rooted in volition. Wholesome actions (kusala kamma) bring beneficial results, while unwholesome actions (akusala kamma) lead to suffering.

2. Specific Causes and Effects: The Buddha identifies particular actions that lead to specific results, such as:
    - Killing leads to a short lifespan, while abstaining from killing leads to longevity.
    - Harsh speech leads to ugliness, while gentle speech leads to beauty.
    - Stinginess leads to poverty, while generosity leads to wealth.
    - Harboring envy leads to a lack of influence, while rejoicing in others' success leads to being influential.
3. Kamma is Not Deterministic: Although kamma influences experiences, it is not the sole factor determining one's life. The Buddha acknowledges the role of natural conditions, effort, and mindfulness in shaping outcomes.
4. Liberation Beyond Kamma: Understanding kamma and its effects helps practitioners live ethically and skillfully, but liberation (nibbāna) lies beyond kamma, achieved through wisdom and the cessation of craving.

Structure of the Sutta:

The **Cūlakammavibhaṅga Sutta** is structured as a dialogue. A young man named Subha approaches the Buddha and asks why there are differences in people's lives. The Buddha responds systematically, explaining how specific actions lead to particular results, emphasizing the moral causality inherent in kamma.

A particularly important line from the Pali Canon is: "Cetanāhaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi: cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā." "It is volition, monks, that I call kamma; for having willed, one acts by body, speech, and mind."

Aṅguttara Nikāya, Chapter 6, Sutta 63) "Nibbedhika Sutta" – The Penetrative Discourse.

In this sutta, the Buddha elaborates on the nature of kamma, emphasizing the central role of volition (cetanā) in defining what constitutes kamma. "Cetanāhaṃ, bhikkhave, kammaṃ vadāmi: cetayitvā kammaṃ karoti kāyena vācāya manasā", is often quoted to explain that kamma originates from intentional actions performed through the three avenues: body (kāya), speech (vācā), and mind (manasā). This teaching clarifies that kamma is not merely about the external act but is deeply rooted in the will and intention behind the action, making it a central component of ethical conduct and the law of cause and effect in the Buddha's teachings.

iii The Pali word cetanā (che-tuhn- nah) is often translated as intention, volition, or will. It refers to the mental factor that drives intentional actions, whether through body, speech, or mind. In the Buddha's teachings, cetanā is central to the concept of kamma (karma) because it determines the ethical quality of an action.
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   This underscores that the moral value of an action depends not just on what is done, but why it is done.

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      Kamma arises when an action is performed with intention. Whether an action is considered wholesome (kusala) or unwholesome (akusala) depends on the quality of the cetanā behind it. For example: Wholesome intentions, such as compassion or generosity, lead to positive outcomes.
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2. Pervasive Influence:
   Cetanā is a universal mental factor present in every conscious action. It governs all actions of body, speech, and mind, linking them to their ethical consequences.

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   In the context of the Buddhist path, cultivating right intention (sammā-saṅkappa) as part of the Noble Eightfold Path involves aligning cetanā with ethical and liberative goals, such as non-harming, renunciation, and compassion. Understanding and refining cetanā is integral to breaking the cycle of saṃsāra.

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v **"Letting Go of the Raft"** is a beautifully contemplative poem that distills the essence of one of the Buddha's most profound teachings—the parable of the raft—into a lyrical and evocative narrative. The imagery is immediate and vivid: a restless river, a traveler on its bank, and the construction of a raft to navigate the unknown. These elements set the stage for a journey that is both physical and metaphorical, echoing the timeless wisdom that the Buddha imparted.

The poem's tone is gentle yet purposeful, drawing the reader into the inner world of the traveler while keeping the external landscape dynamic and alive. The river's currents are depicted as powerful and untamed, reflecting the unpredictability and challenges of life. The traveler's act of building the raft—a humble, fragile vessel—is a testament to resourcefulness and determination. The poem does an excellent job of reminding us that our tools and practices are born of necessity, not permanence, and that their value lies in their ability to guide us through life's turbulent waters.

What stands out most in this poem is its simplicity and clarity. The language is accessible without losing its depth, making the metaphor of the raft resonate on a universal level. The traveler's efforts to row through the "rocks" and "rapids" mirror the struggles of human existence, and the eventual arrival at the serene shore captures the ultimate goal of liberation. Yet, the poem does not linger on the shore; its focus shifts to the act of letting go. The lines, "The raft, once cherished, now let go, / Its purpose served, its work to show," encapsulate the essence of the Buddha's teaching—that the tools we use to navigate life, while vital, must not become objects of clinging.

The poem skillfully avoids the pitfalls of abstraction by grounding its insights in tangible actions and experiences. The raft becomes a symbol of the Dhamma—practical, purposeful, and adaptable. The traveler's journey reminds us that wisdom and teachings are meant to be applied, not idolized. This theme is reinforced in the lines, "For tools are means, not ends to hold, / Their worth is found in use, not gold." The poet makes it clear that the raft is not the ultimate truth but a vehicle to move closer to understanding. This humility, woven into the narrative, aligns perfectly with the Buddhist view of the teachings as a path, not a destination.

The conclusion of the poem ties everything together with a serene elegance. The traveler learns to release the raft, embodying the practice of non-attachment. The final lines, "The tools we build, the paths we take, / Are not the truths but forms we make," linger in the reader's mind, offering a subtle yet profound reminder to question what we hold onto in life. The

emphasis on release, peace, and the transient nature of both struggle and support encapsulates the heart of Buddhist philosophy.

What makes "Letting Go of the Raft" so effective is its ability to speak to readers on multiple levels. On one hand, it can be read as a simple story of persistence and release. On the other, it invites deeper reflection on the nature of clinging, the impermanence of tools, and the ultimate goal of finding peace. The repetition of the imagery—the raft, the river, and the shore—gives the poem a rhythmic quality that mirrors the flowing nature of its subject.

Ultimately, the poem serves as a quiet yet powerful meditation on what it means to cross the river of life. It is not the raft that matters, nor the river itself, but the act of navigating with intention and eventually letting go. This makes the poem not only a beautiful piece of writing but also a practical guide for those seeking to understand and embody the teachings of the Buddha. It leaves the reader with a sense of calm and clarity, much like the traveler reaching the far shore, ready to let the raft drift away. -Panna Foundation Publishing- S.M. Editor

Alagaddūpama Sutta

The poem "Letting Go of the Raft" is based on the "Parable of the Raft" from the Alagaddūpama Sutta (MN 22), which is part of the Majjhima Nikaya (Middle Length Discourses) in the Pali Canon. This sutta is also known as The Discourse on the Simile of the Snake.

In the Alagaddūpama Sutta, the Buddha uses the parable of the raft to illustrate how his teachings (the Dhamma) should be approached. He explains that the Dhamma is like a raft built to cross a river. Once the river is crossed and the other shore is reached, the raft has fulfilled its purpose and should not be carried further. The Buddha emphasizes that his teachings are tools to overcome suffering, not doctrines to cling to or idolize. To hold on to the raft after crossing the river would be unnecessary and burdensome, just as clinging to the teachings without understanding their purpose would hinder liberation.

This parable perfectly aligns with the themes in the poem, which highlight the impermanence of tools, the act of letting go, and the importance of using the teachings to navigate life's challenges. The poem reflects the Buddha's message that the path to liberation requires skillful use of the Dhamma and the wisdom to release it when its purpose is served.

vi "**The Nature of Wisdom**" is a poem that feels as timeless as the teachings it reflects. It uses the metaphor of a serpent to explore the nature of wisdom, specifically the teachings of the Buddha, with remarkable clarity and evocative imagery. The serpent is calm, watchful, and poised—a potent yet neutral presence. This metaphor is perfectly chosen, encapsulating both the gentle guidance and the potential danger of mishandling wisdom. The poem's opening lines immediately draw the reader into this contemplative world, setting a meditative tone with imagery of rivers, shade, and a still, coiled snake.

The poem's balance between encouragement and caution is one of its greatest strengths. It does not portray wisdom as something unattainable or esoteric but instead as something close and accessible, waiting for us to approach it with care and intention. The recurring refrain, "Grasp well," attributed to the Buddha, reinforces this theme and anchors the poem. This refrain serves as a reminder that wisdom, while invaluable, must be approached skillfully. Mishandling wisdom, much like mishandling a snake, can lead to harm, with consequences that echo in both the personal and the broader spiritual sense. The lines, "The map is not the road you tread, the meal is not the words you've read," capture the essence of the poem's message: wisdom is not about intellectual understanding alone but about practice and lived experience.

The tone of the poem is contemplative and reflective without being overly didactic. It invites the reader into a space of self-examination, encouraging them to reflect on how they engage with teachings. The imagery is vivid yet restrained, with the snake gleaming silently in a grove, embodying both beauty and latent danger. This balanced approach is particularly effective in communicating the dual nature of wisdom—it is both a guide and a challenge, depending on how it is approached.

The poem also critiques dogma and the static interpretation of teachings, emphasizing the dynamic and personal relationship one must have with the Buddha's words. The lines, "The snake, once poised to teach and guide, becomes inert when rules preside," point to the danger of turning wisdom into rigid rules or institutionalized doctrines. The poet, Dipabhasadhamma, underscores the Buddha's teachings as tools to be used skillfully, not as chains to bind or objects of mere intellectual pride. This critique is particularly relevant in today's world, where information is abundant, but its true application is often neglected.

Another strength of the poem is its accessibility. While deeply rooted in the Buddha's teachings, it speaks to modern readers in a language they can understand. The emphasis on action over idle contemplation is a timeless and universal message. Lines like, "The teachings serve the heart in motion, Not still, unmoved, like stagnant oceans," remind us that wisdom requires engagement and effort. Without this active application, the teachings lose their vitality, becoming lifeless relics rather than living guides.

The poem's conclusion brings everything full circle, leaving the reader with a clear and powerful call to reflection: "Reflect, dear one, on what you hold, the path is walked, not bought or sold." This closing sentiment reinforces the poem's central theme that wisdom is not something to be passively acquired or hoarded but something to be lived and embodied. Dipabhasadhamma's understanding of the Buddha's teachings is evident throughout the poem. His ability to translate their depth into an accessible, poetic framework is a testament to his insight and skill as a writer. "The Nature of Wisdom" is not just a meditation on the Buddha's words but an invitation to walk the path they illuminate. It challenges readers to move beyond intellectual admiration and into the realm of practice, making it both a profound and practical piece of writing. -Panna Foundation Publishing – S.M. Editor

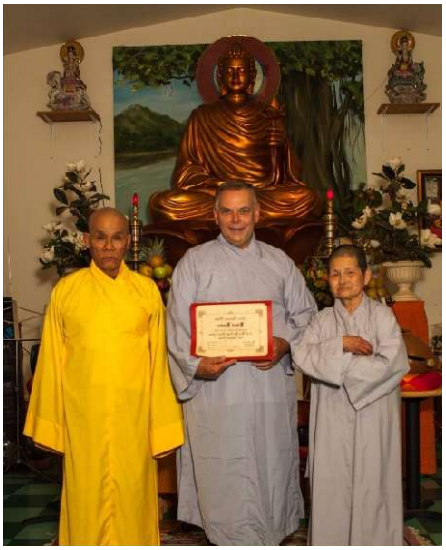
Alagaddūpama Sutta (Ah-lah-gah-doo-puh-mah)

The poem "**The Nature of Wisdom**" appears to draw heavily from the Buddha's teachings found in the Alagaddūpama Sutta (MN 22), also known as The Discourse on the Simile of the Snake. This sutta is part of the Majjhima Nikaya (Middle Length Discourses) in the Pali Canon.

In the Alagaddūpama Sutta, the Buddha uses the simile of a snake to explain how his teachings (Dhamma) should be approached and understood. He warns that if the teachings are "grasped" incorrectly—like someone handling a snake carelessly—they can cause harm instead of leading to liberation. The snake represents the Dhamma, which is a powerful tool for liberation but must be used with wisdom and proper understanding. The sutta also emphasizes the importance of skillful practice, warning against clinging to the teachings as ends in themselves or using them as grounds for pride or contention.

The poem reflects these core messages by illustrating the dual nature of wisdom: its potential for healing and guidance when used skillfully, and its potential for harm when misunderstood or misapplied. It also echoes the sutta's call for intentional and skillful engagement with the teachings, rather than treating them as objects of intellectual pride or rigid dogma.

About the Author



Dīpabhasadhamma—born Russell Alton Heroux Jr. in a small New England town in the 1950s—has lived a life shaped by hardship, inquiry, education and transformation. In his youth, amid the religious divisions of mid-century America, he witnessed both the promise and the pain of human conviction. These early experiences ignited a lifelong search to understand the roots of suffering and the conditions of freedom.

An avid student of ancient history, philosophy, and science, he immersed himself in disciplines ranging from archaeology to quantum physics, developing what he calls "a wide-angle view of human life." In the 1990s, while serving as CEO of a California technology company, he encountered the recorded teachings of Pema Chödrön, sparking a deep engagement with the Buddha's philosophy and practice.

He first entered the Zen tradition, taking vows under Thich Thien Pho who gave him the Dharma name Thích Minh Đăng— "a lamp that illuminates the Dhamma." Later, drawn to what he regarded as the earliest and most direct expression of the Buddha's words, he turned toward the Theravāda tradition. When a congenital spinal condition, Ankylosing Spondylitis, prevented him from full monastic ordination, he embraced instead a life wholly devoted to the Dhamma through writing and teaching.

Recognized by the Venerable Vijayadhamma of Bodh Gaya, India he was assigned the name Dīpabhasadhamma— "the radiance of the Dhamma"—he continues to illuminate the Buddha's path for modern seekers. His life and work reflect the truth he teaches: that liberation does not depend on circumstance but on understanding.

Now residing in Nevada, he leads a quiet life of study and contemplation, dedicating his remaining years to sharing the Buddha's timeless insights with clarity and compassion. His dream is to establish the Paññādhammālaya Center—a Theravāda monastery and refuge of study for all who wish to walk the path of wisdom and peace.

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